

THE MEXICO ISSUE

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HOW TO
MAKE THE
ULTIMATE
TORTILLA

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**FRESH,
BOLD
RECIPES**

SAVORY
TACOS,
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STEWES

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REDISCOVER PUNCH WITH FRESH INGREDIENTS AND GREY GOOSE® VODKA



GREY GOOSE® LA POIRE LAKESHORE PUNCH

INGREDIENTS

5 parts Grey Goose® La Poire
4 parts Pear Nectar
3 parts Elderflower Liqueur
2 parts freshly squeezed Lime Juice
1 whole large Cucumber
1 whole bunch of Mint

INSTRUCTIONS

Mint water: 2 parts hot water and 1 bunch of mint. Let macerate for 10 min. Strain and let cool down.
Cut the cucumber into thin slices. Add remaining ingredients into the Punch vessel. Let macerate in the fridge for 2 hours. Serve into glasses filled with ice and garnish with the cucumber slices from the Punch vessel. Add fresh mint.



GREY GOOSE® LE CITRON BOSTON TEA PUNCH

INGREDIENTS

5 parts Grey Goose® Le Citron
4 parts Earl Grey Tea
3 whole Lemons
2 parts Raw Cane Sugar Syrup
(1 part Raw Cane Sugar & 1 part Water)
1 lump of Ice

INSTRUCTIONS

Dilute raw cane sugar syrup with warm Earl Grey tea in the Punch vessel. Add all other ingredients. (Slice lemons into thin wheels) Let macerate in your fridge for 2 hours.
Stir well for 1 min. Serve in glasses filled with ice and garnish with lemons from Punch.



GREY GOOSE® WEST HOLLYWOOD PUNCH

INGREDIENTS

5 parts Grey Goose® Original
4 parts freshly squeezed
White Grape Juice
3 parts fresh Blueberries
2 freshly squeezed Oranges
5 Star Anise

INSTRUCTIONS

Peel the skin of the 2 oranges. Juice the naked oranges into the vessel. Add all remaining ingredients, including 5 star anise. Let macerate in your fridge for 2 hours.
Stir well for 1 min. Serve in glasses filled with ice. Garnish with blueberries, star anise and orange peels.



GREY GOOSE® CHERRY NOIR HAMPTONS PUNCH

INGREDIENTS

5 parts Grey Goose® Cherry Noir
4 parts fresh seasonal Strawberries
3 parts freshly squeezed
White Grapefruit Juice
2 parts Basil Simple Syrup
1 lump of Ice

INSTRUCTIONS

Basil simple syrup: Prepare in a glass bottle (the day before), ½ caster sugar + ½ hot water, add 10 fresh basil leaves. Cut strawberries into thin heart slices. Add all ingredients to vessel. Let macerate in your fridge for 2 hours.

Stir well for 1 min. Serve in glasses filled with ice. Garnish with strawberries and fresh basil leaves.



GREY GOOSE® L'ORANGE SOUTH BEACH

INGREDIENTS

5 parts Grey Goose® L'Orange
4 parts freshly squeezed Ruby
Red Grapefruit Juice
3 parts Red Chili Water
2 parts Agave Nectar

INSTRUCTIONS

Red chili water: Cut 3 chilis in half. Let macerate in hot water with seeds for 10 min, strain, then let cool. Add all ingredients to the vessel. Let macerate in your fridge for 2 hours.

Stir well for 1 min. Serve in glasses filled with ice and garnish with fresh ruby red grapefruit cut into ½ inch slices.



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SUMMER IS SERVED



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TASTE

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Spicy Cheeseburger Sliders

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SPICY CHEESEBURGER SLIDERS



Total recipe time: 25-30 minutes
Makes 8 sliders

Ingredients

- 1 pound ground beef (96% lean)
- 9 small whole wheat hamburger buns, split, divided
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon ground chipotle chili powder
- 2 slices pepper jack cheese, cut in quarters

Toppings

- barbecue sauce
- lettuce
- tomato slices
- pickles (optional)

1. Tear one hamburger bun into pieces. Place in food processor or blender container. Cover; pulse on and off, to form fine crumbs.
2. Combine bread crumbs, beef, garlic and chili powder in medium bowl, mixing lightly but thoroughly. Lightly shape into eight ½-inch-thick mini patties.
3. Place patties on grill over medium, ash-covered coals. Grill, covered, 8 to 9 minutes (over medium heat on preheated gas grill, 9 to 10 minutes) until instant-read thermometer inserted horizontally into center registers 160°F, turning occasionally. Evenly top with cheese during last minute of grilling.
4. Place burgers on bottoms of remaining eight buns. Top with desired toppings. Close sandwiches.

Nutrition information per serving (1/8 of recipe): 201 calories; 6 g fat (3 g saturated fat; 0 g monounsaturated fat); 40 mg cholesterol; 266 mg sodium; 21 g carbohydrate; 3.1 g fiber; 16 g protein; 4.1 mg niacin; 0.2 mg vitamin B₆; 1.1 mcg vitamin B₁₂; 2.3 mg iron; 28.8 mcg selenium; 3.4 mg zinc; 50.8 mg choline. This recipe is an excellent source of protein, niacin, selenium and zinc; and a good source of fiber, vitamin B₆, vitamin B₁₂ and iron.

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SAVEUR

SPECIAL ISSUE

MEXICO



ADAM WISEMAN

From the refined restaurants of Mexico City to the country's regional cooking, from the foods of the desert to those of the sea, the flavors of Mexico are some of the freshest, boldest, and most delicious in the world. It's all here: singular burritos from Juárez (page 54); the intense moles of Puebla (page 32); the soul-satisfying dishes of the Yucatán (page 48). But it's the people of Mexico who bring these foods to life—from the authority Diana Kennedy (page 56) to the home cooks and chefs from all over the country who opened their kitchens to us. In this issue, discover recipes for the salsas, grilled meats and fish, soft tortillas, slow-simmered stews, and more, that define the cuisine. The time has come to celebrate Mexican cooking, for all that it is. Join us.

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Cover Oaxacan Red Chile Enchiladas PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COLEMAN

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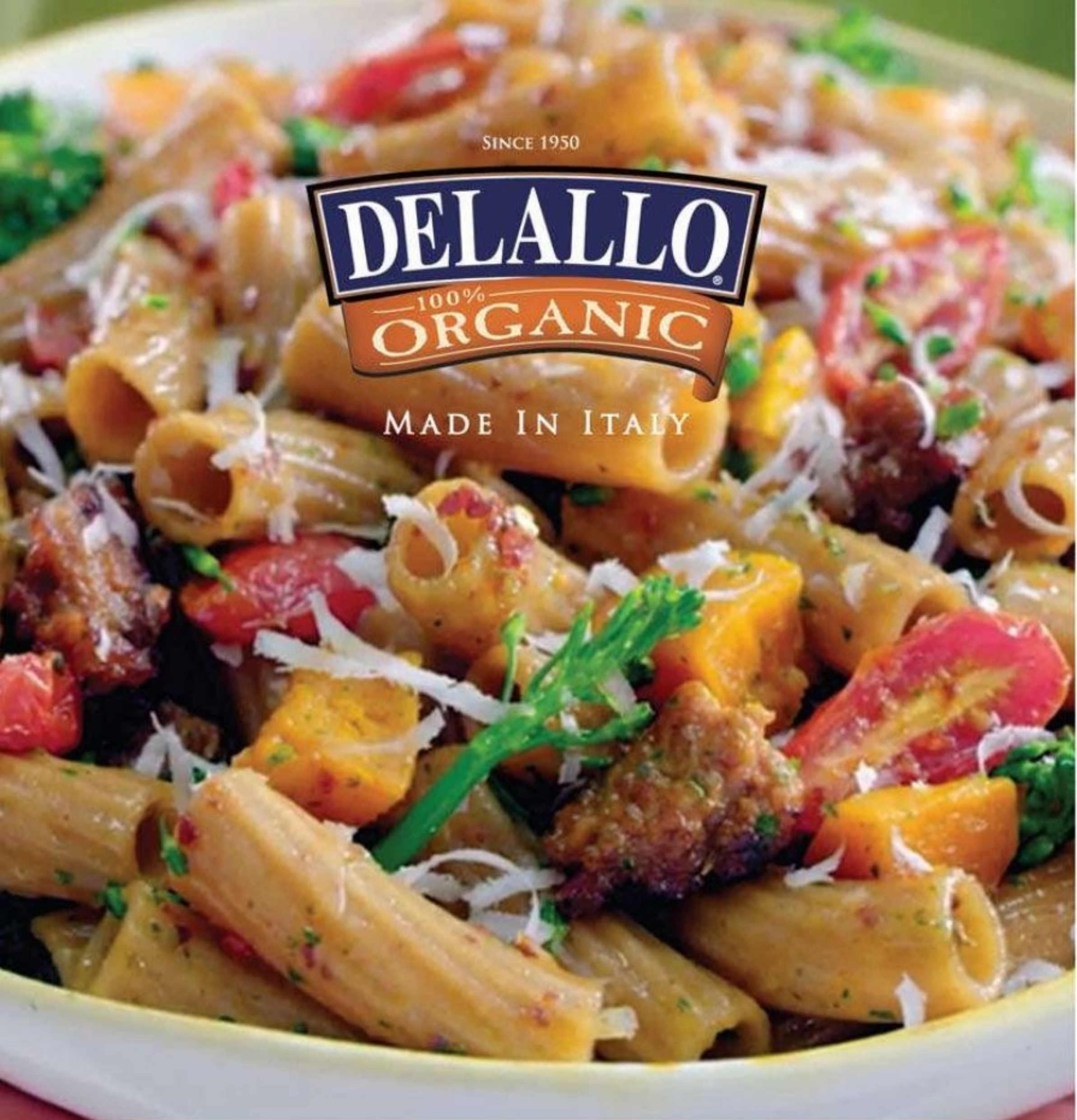

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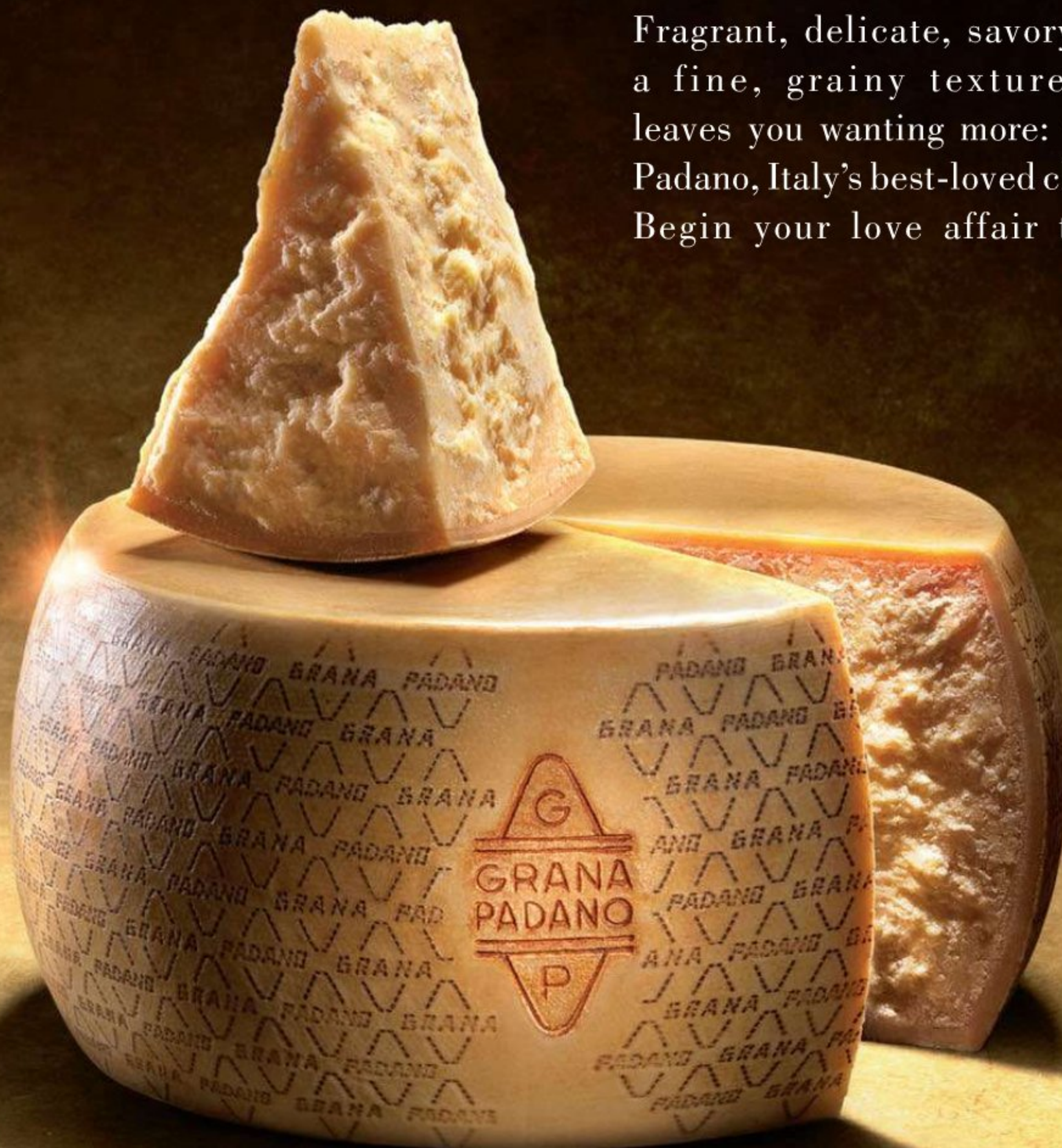
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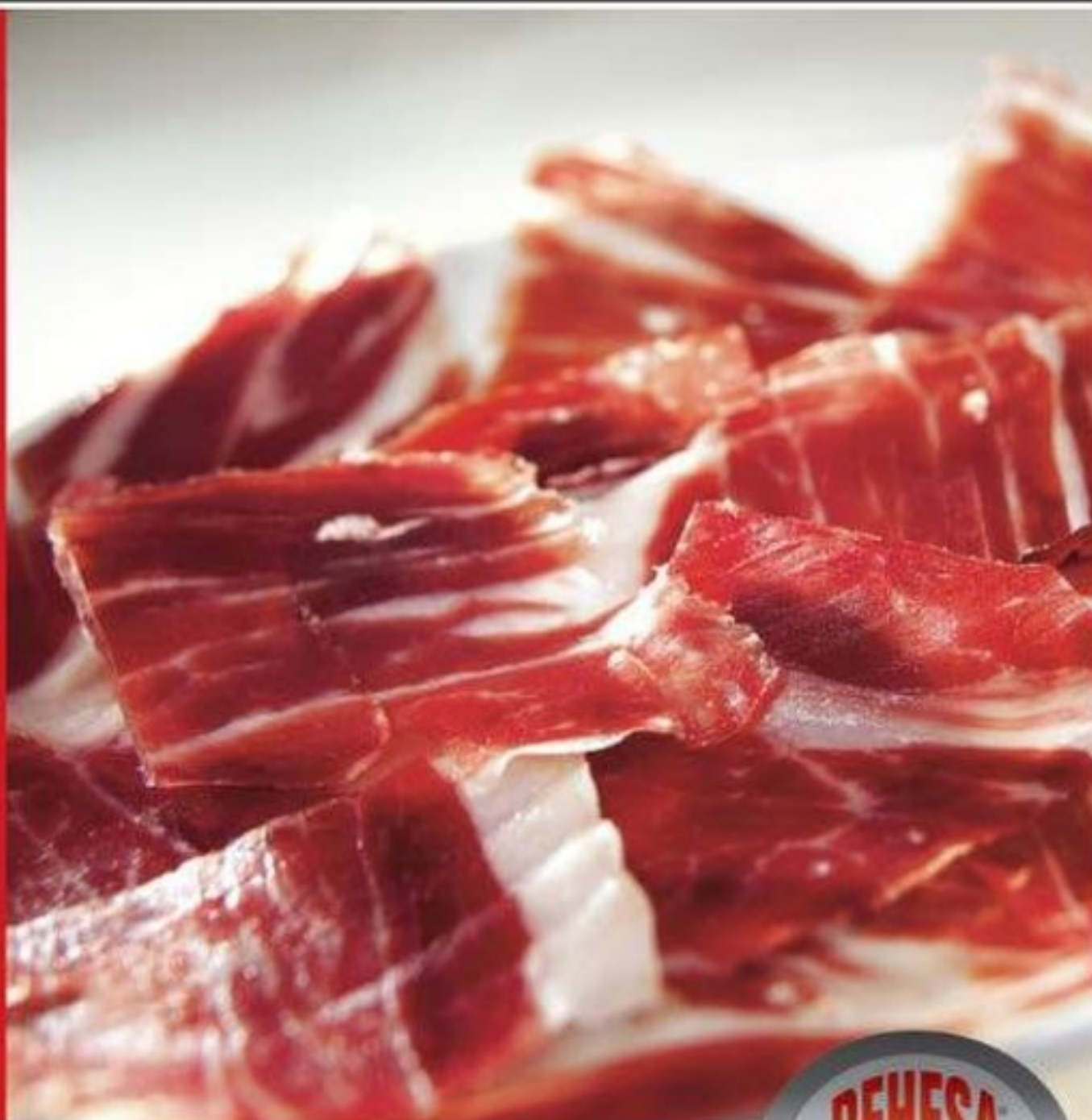
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MASTERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN



Yucatán

Traditional Mayan-Spanish Cuisine

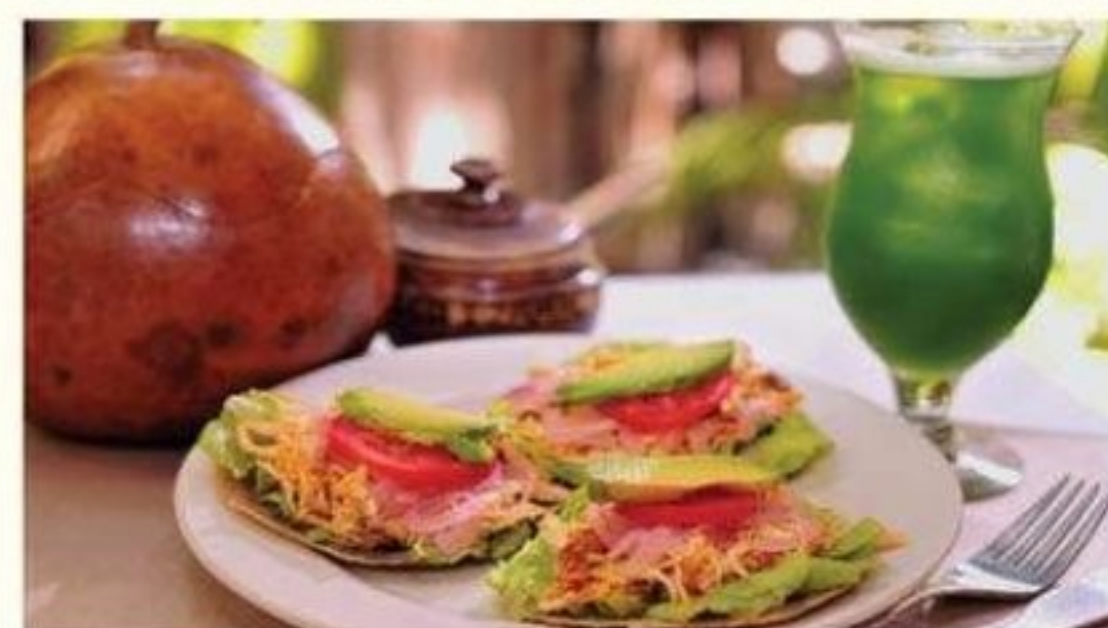
The culinary delights of a typical Yucatecan kitchen arise from an exquisite blend of ingredients used by the ancient Mayas, blended with flavors brought by the Spanish during the Colonial era and later and contributions from the Caribbean and the Middle East. The Yucatan Peninsula was for many years considered to be inaccessible due to the few roads that led here. However although isolated from the rest of the country, thanks to its ports there was a constant exchange of trade and cultural contracts with Europe, especially France, as well as New Orleans and Cuba. The people of Yucatan were naturally influenced by many aspects of these countries and cities, thus forming the basis of one of the best known cuisines of Mexico and the world.

And no wonder Yucatecan food has an international reputation, given its unique combination of condiments and spices such as pumpkin seed, oregano, red onion, sour orange, sweet chile, tomato, achiote, the xcatic chile, chile habanero, chile max and cilantro which in combination give that special taste to the food of this region. Yucatan was once known as the "Land of the pheasant and the deer" for the popularity of these species as the main ingredients of the local cuisine. Today they have been replaced by pork and turkey, which with the addition of seasonings and spices give birth to the delicious regional dishes that today we all know and enjoy, such as cochinita pibil, one of the most typical and well known specialties in this country.

Other specialties are the delicious salbutes and panuchos, handmade tortillas made of corn, fried and covered with black beans, shredded beef or chicken, turkey, lettuce, red onion and the "xnipec" salsa; delicious papadzules, which are made of tortillas dipped in a sauce made of squash seeds and stuffed with hard-boiled egg, topped with tomato sauce and chile habanero; lime soup, much like chicken broth but with the subtle taste of lime; turkey in black sauce or "chilmole", a filled cheese, the traditional poc-chuc, and tikinxic which is fish marinated in achiote, wrapped in banana leaves and roasted, served with a rich sauce made of tomatoes and chile habanero.

The chile habanero, considered one of the hottest peppers in the world and with a denomination of origin, is widely used as a flavoring in all its forms, and as a very special ingredient in prepared food. This chili is used to prepare the very spicy "xnipec", a salsa made with lime juice, onion, tomato and chopped and roasted chile habanero. Other dishes that are typical of the region although perhaps less known as they tend to be homemade, are puchero (a stew) with three types of meat, chocolomo, chicken pibil, black beans with pork, huevos motuleños (Motul-style eggs), lentil stew, and tamales, either vaporcitos or colados.

To drink we have the delicious horchata, ricebased beverage; chaya blended with lemon, lemonade, orangeade, and other fruit drinks made of crushed fruit with water; as well as the refreshing trolebuses (fresh fruit smoothies), sorbets and ices that we can enjoy in the shade of the verdant trees along the Paseo Montejo. Another typical drink is the delicious xtabentun, better known as the "liquor of the gods", made of honey and anise. Our desserts are another example of the quality of Yucatecan cuisine, the perfect end for any dinner or special meal. Most are made of local fruits such as papaya, nance, plums or ciricote; as well as the rich coconut cream or coconut sweets, or the "caballero pobre" (poor gentleman) always a delight to the most discerning palates.



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FIRST



A Grand Tour

In our travels through Mexico, we found remarkable guides

WHAT WAS YOUR first experience of real Mexican food? When I was growing up in California in the 1960s and '70s, the combo plate reigned supreme. It wasn't until I was 17 that I actually traveled to Mexico, driving with my dad down to Chiapas and back in our Dodge station wagon. I couldn't identify exactly what people there were eating at first, but I responded instantly and hungrily to the aromas of spice, citrus, and meat grilling. From a carne asada taco I had at a market in Monterrey to a saffron-laced tamale in San Cristóbal de las Casas, real Mexican food was a revelation.

On one level, this very special issue of *SAVEUR* was just a good excuse to get back to Mexico—a country I love as though it were my own. On a recent trip I explored Mexico City with chef Patricia Quintana (“Soup Country,” [page 52](#)) and Mérida, in the Yucatán, with writer Mauricio Velázquez de León (“Queen of the Yucatán,” [page 48](#)). Other *SAVEUR* staffers found their own guides as they traveled the country over the last year, such as Marcelina Rosado Guerra, in coastal Oaxaca, who showed editors Beth Kracklauer and Todd Coleman how she prepares the seafood her husband, a fisherman, brings

in each day (“In Full Bloom,” [page 24](#)). Back in the *SAVEUR* test kitchen, we were grateful for an ad hoc committee of Mexican chefs who came in to share their recipes and cooking wisdom: Iliana de la Vega, of El Naranjo restaurant in Austin, Texas; brothers Hugo and Ruben Ortega, of Hugo's, in Houston; and Roberto Santibañez, of the Fonda restaurants in New York City.

For anyone who's traveled to Mexico, it's difficult to reconcile this beautiful place with the headlines we read focusing on drug wars and violence. That the images these headlines conjure should be the ones most available to us in the States is deeply distressing. Mexico, at least in my experience, has always been a warm, intensely gracious place to visit; in between trips, I've traveled there through cooking. With this issue, you can, too.

What follows is not a comprehensive course in Mexican cooking—the vastness of the subject demands volumes. But it is an issue of *SAVEUR* unlike any other. This lovingly assembled collection of stories, recipes, tips, and more is our earnest attempt to do justice to the majesty of Mexican cuisine. The journey starts on [page 16](#). —*JAMES OSELAND, Editor-in-Chief*

Our advisory team of Mexican chefs, from left: Hugo Ortega, Ruben Ortega, Roberto Santibañez, and Iliana de la Vega.



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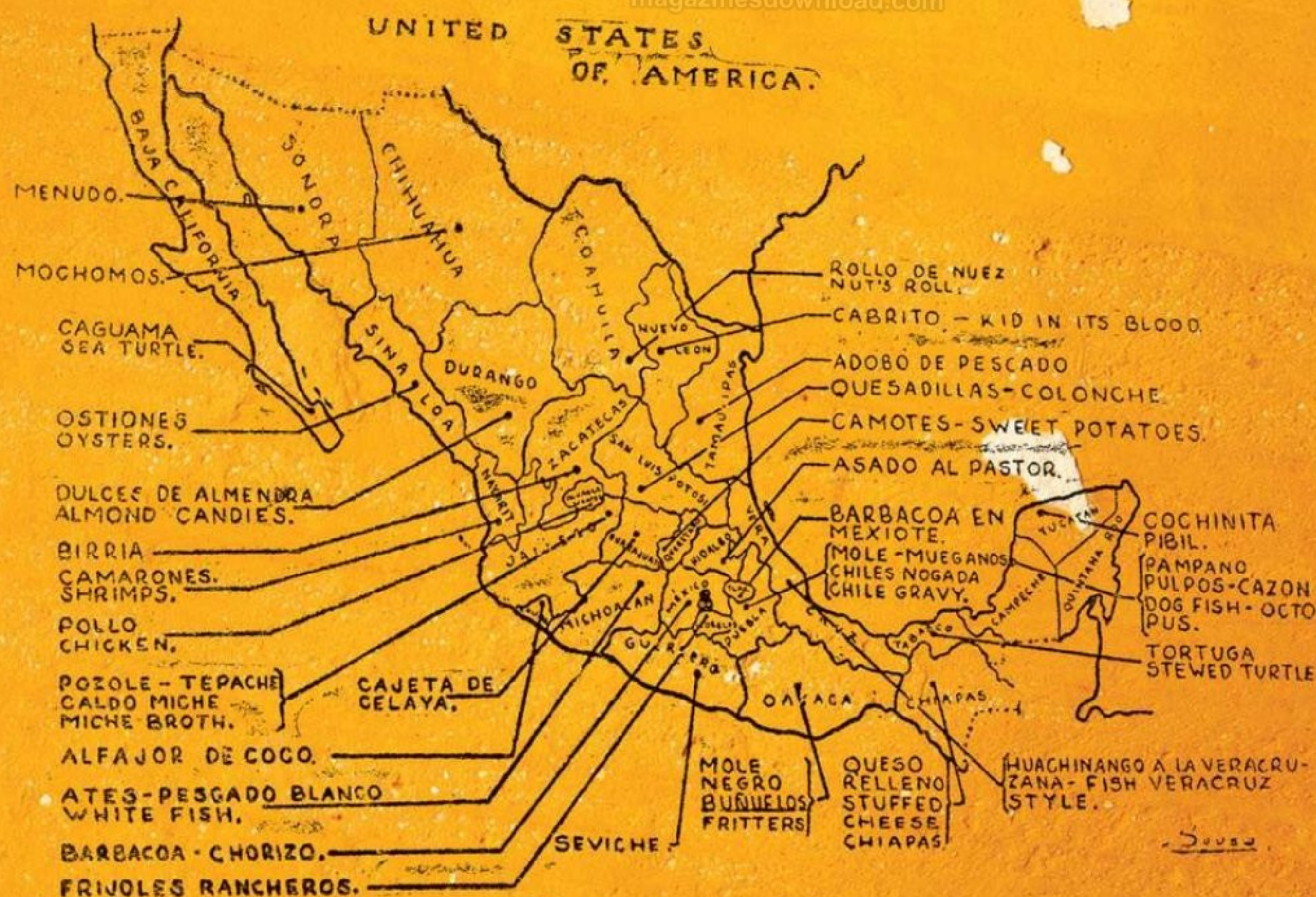


EATING



In a market in Villa de
Zaachila, Oaxaca, a vendor
sells tacos with a variety of
different fillings.

MEXICO



For all its complexity, Mexican food is primordial—it speaks on a gut level. It’s no wonder: Carried in its DNA are the slow-simmered flavors of the indigenous kitchen, which was little more than a fire pit, earthenware pots, and a clay griddle. Grounded as Mexican cooking is, it’s also bright and transparent, having adapted all kinds of imported foods to its palette of beans, chiles, tomatoes, and corn. From the Spaniards came grilled meats; lime and cilantro were brought on galleons in the 16th century; breads like *bolillo*, the Mexican sandwich roll, are the legacy of the French, who came in the 1860s. Mexicans welcomed these new tastes. They melded them with their native flavors to create something new. I love

A map of Mexico annotated with regional foods, from *Mexican Cook Book Devoted to American Homes*, published by Josefina Velázquez de León in 1947.

the way these foods are so expressive of the specific geography, climate, and culture in which they were born. That regional distinctiveness can be astonishing to Americans who only know the food that's served in Stateside Mexican restaurants. In fact, what cooks are making in Baja California is worlds apart from what folks are eating in the Yucatán or in Oaxaca. As a chef and devotee of the Mexican kitchen, I've spent nearly four decades immersed in these cuisines, and there is one thing I've learned for certain: A lifetime is not long enough to taste it all. —*Rick Bayless, chef-owner of Chicago's Topolobampo and Frontera Grill and author of Fiesta at Rick's (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010)*



THE LAY OF THE LAND

Yucatecans consider themselves a people apart. Most of the **YUCATÁN PENINSULA**, the remote southeastern region bordered by the Caribbean Sea on the east coast and the Gulf of Mexico on the north and west, wasn't even part of Mexico until the 1800s. The Yucatán remains an out-back in many ways, a limestone moonscape irrigated by underground rivers with dense jungles that, while cleared by farmers centuries ago, are now lush and overgrown. For millennia this has been the domain of the Maya, and the food here has more visible remnants of pre-Columbian cooking than anywhere else in Mexico. Yes, the region is famous for habanero chiles; *cochinita pibil*, or sour-orange-marinated pork; and coastal delicacies like lime-marinated ceviches and tangy *pescado en escabeche*, or pickled fish. But, in my mind, the taste of the Yucatán is truly embodied by dishes like *papadzules*: a corn tortilla dipped in a silky pumpkin-seed sauce, filled with chopped egg, and splashed with tomato sauce; or Mexico's most delicious tamales, called *tamales colados*, a kind of corn-masa pudding. These are two dishes that celebrate—even glorify—indigenous ingredients, cooked in a way that is almost entirely unique to this place. —R.B.



It may be as hard to define native **MEXICO CITY** cuisine as it is to find a native resident in this metropolitan area of 20 million or so, since at times it seems everyone you meet here has come from elsewhere. There are elements of the meaty cooking of El Bajío, to the west; there are moles, those rich sauces that most people associate with Oaxaca or Puebla but which are part of everyday life in the capital too. But trying to pinpoint the native cuisine misses the point. Mexico City is a celebration of every kind of Mexican cooking, from the wildly avant-garde to humble street snacks. And when it comes to food, the capital city goes big. Few things are more inspiring than a visit to the vast La Merced market. One can get lost among the dried chiles for hours—30 or 40 varieties, all meticulously labeled, begging to be toasted or ground for a sauce. During the rainy season, growers arrive with towering piles of porcinis, chanterelles, morels, and also *huitlacoche*, the earthy-tasting corn fungus, sold on the ear. The market is pulsating with life and shot through with surreal scenes, like the little crimson strawberries that inexplicably appear adjacent to the bones and flesh in a corner of the meat pavilion. Such juxtapositions are typical of Mexico City and, for a cook, an irresistible invitation to expand the mind and palate. —R.B.



A waiter at Sobrinos, a restaurant in Mexico City. Facing page: an aerial view of the jungle landscape of the Yucatán Peninsula.



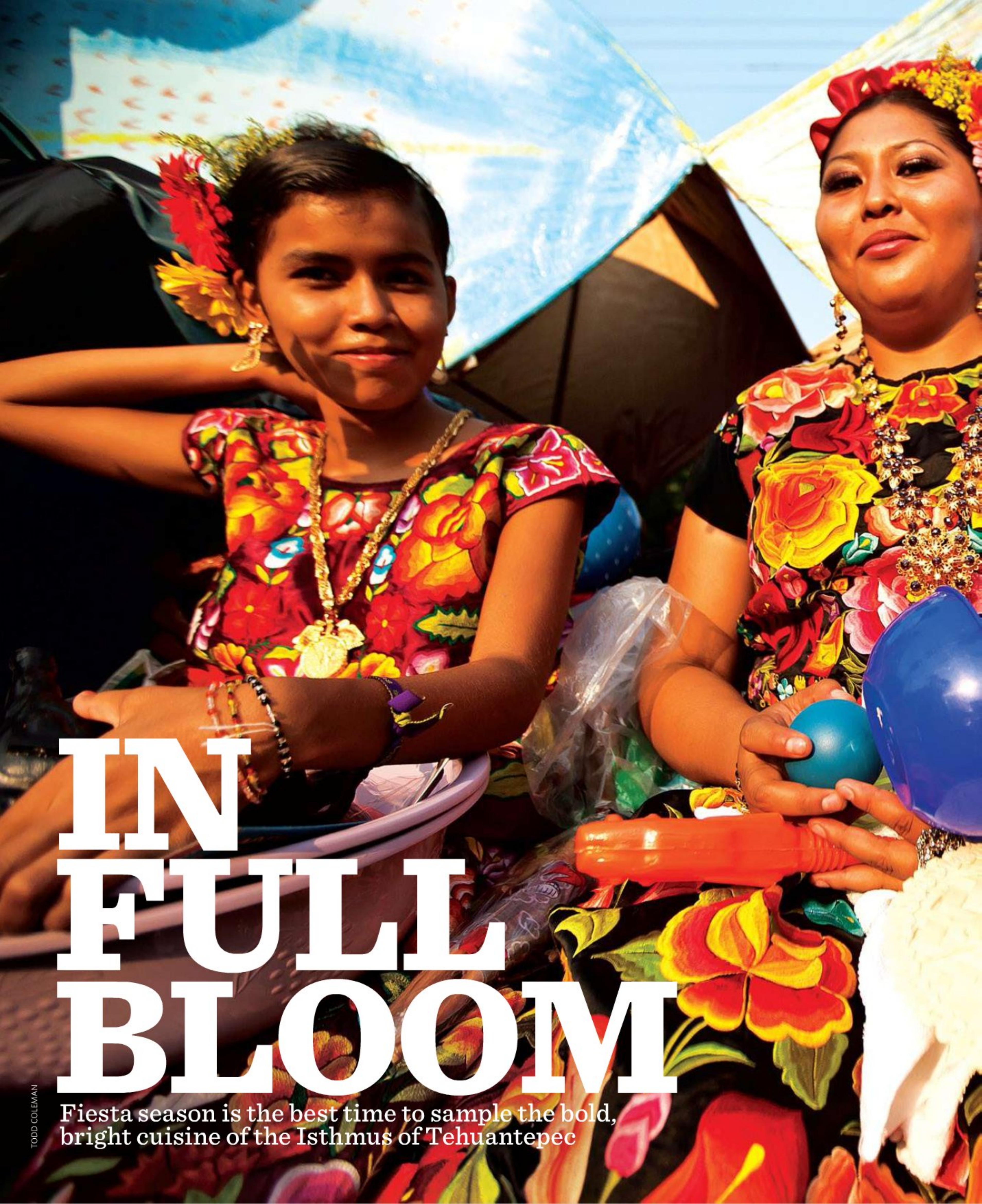
EL BAJÍO, the fertile region that encompasses Mexico's vast central plains, conjures images of great savannah dotted with agave and cactus. It also brings to mind meat—lots of meat—tender *carnitas*, juicy *carne asada*, rich pork *pozoles*. There are incomparable goat *birrias* to be had in the Juárez Market of Guadalajara, where scores of stalls serve nothing but this flavorful braise. The vendors have built special slow-cooking ovens that turn out shimmering hunks of tender meat, which they chop up, put in a bowl for you, and drench in the cooking juices. El Bajío is also the cradle of the type of Mexican food that has won over the world: crisp-fried tortillas, crunchy tostadas, and the like. After all, this is where the early waves of Mexican immigrants to California hailed from, and it was their style of cooking that planted some of the seeds for Cal-Mex and Mexican-American cuisine as we know it today. —R.B.



For someone traveling from Mexico's fertile southern tier, arriving in the **DESERTS** of the north can be startling: A serene and empty landscape, save for the occasional pecan grove and stalwart cacti bearing prickly pears. The markets here are sparer, and at first blush the food seems more austere, too. You won't find as many moles as in the south, or three dozen varieties of chile. Beef and *cabrito* (kid goat), often wood-grilled, tend to have pride of place over pork. Corn tortillas, ubiquitous everywhere else, are rivaled here by ones made of wheat flour—a legacy of the Spanish, who planted wheat in irrigated fields along rivers. This is the spiritual home of the burrito, after all; here, it's a minimalist creation that bears little resemblance to the behemoths served in the States. And the quesadillas of the desert are incomparably delicious, thanks to the combination of that soft, rich flour tortilla and slices of smooth-melting, mildly tangy Chihuahua cheese, a legacy of Mennonite settlers, and the ideal complement to the nutty-tasting wrapper. Add to that any number of fillings, from strips of hot chiles to air-dried meat to *nopales* (cactus paddles), and you'll understand firsthand how satisfying and appealing the fundamental foods of the desert are. —R.B.



Cacti punctuate rows of zucchini at a farm in the Sonoran desert. Facing page: A vendor in the Juárez Market of Guadalajara prepares *taco de carne asada*, a grilled steak taco (see [page 80](#) for a recipe).



IN FULL BLOOM

Fiesta season is the best time to sample the bold, bright cuisine of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec



At a parade in Juchitán, Oaxaca, a float carries women distributing gifts to the crowd.



Pescado encarcelado, fish stuffed with pico de gallo (see page 82 for a recipe). Facing page, scenes from Juchitán. Top row, from left: mangos for sale at a roadside stand; *pollo al horno*, chile-spiced grilled chicken (see page 80 for a recipe); a market vendor. Middle row: *coctel de mariscos*, seafood cocktail (see page 67 for a recipe); a young participant in a parade; *aguas frescas* made from tamarind, watermelon, and lime. Bottom row: *guisado de pollo*, chicken and potato stew (see page 80 for a recipe); a guest at a fiesta; *tostadas de camarón seco*, shrimp tostadas (see page 67 for a recipe).



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THEY FAVOR BRASH AND SALINE FLAVORS HERE IN THE ISTHMUS, BUFFETED BY THE GULF OF MEXICO ON ONE SIDE AND THE PACIFIC OCEAN ON THE OTHER

I'm told things are going to get a little wild later on. But the day begins quietly, under a palm-thatched *palapa* at the edge of a lagoon. It's a restaurant called Las Tres Tecas—"Tecas" being short for Juchitecas, the famously hard-bargaining women of the nearby market town of Juchitán—where the Teca in charge, Marcelina Rosado Guerra, cooks the seafood that her husband spends the nighttime hours hauling from the water. Wood-roasted striped mullet stuffed with tomatoes and chiles; a lime-drenched shrimp ceviche I scoop up with *totopos*, corn tortillas baked to a crisp in an adobe oven: It's a meal run through with the brash and saline flavors they favor here in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a windswept strip of land at the southeastern corner of Oaxaca state, buffeted by the Gulf of Mexico on one side and the Pacific Ocean on the other. Having tasted Isthmus-style cooking years

ago at a restaurant in the capital city of Oaxaca, I knew I'd make my way here one day. What I didn't know is that I'd arrive in May, fiesta time, a monthlong party that's part Roman Catholic ritual and part pre-Columbian pantheism, but mostly a lot of dancing, drinking, and feasting.

I fall in step with the festivities at a *regada de frutas*, a parade complete with brass bands and floats carrying regal Juchitecas tossing out prizes of candy, toilet paper, kitchenware. It's in honor of Santa Cruz de los Pescadores and the bounty the sea provides. A woman in traditional ankle-length attire of black velvet emblazoned with floral embroidery smiles and hands me a plastic mixing bowl as the float she's riding on drifts along; close behind, resplendent in lamé and peacock feathers, a beautiful *muxe*—the name for a man who lives as a woman, the "third sex" traditionally recognized in the Zapotec Indian communities of the Isthmus—dances by on foot. Each of these celebrations lasts two or three days: first the *vela* (party), then a parade like this one, then the *lavada de ollas*, a traditional "washing of the pots" that in practice is just another party. For the next several days I'm constantly confused about which holiday I'm actually celebrating.

The next day, I'm on a residential block collectively observing the *vela* of Guigu Dxita, a celebration giving thanks for the eggs laid along the region's rivers by iguanas and turtles, cherished delicacies here. Headquarters is the home of the *mayordoma*, or festival sponsor, Martina Rasgado Orozco, a lady with the brisk and benevolent air of a fairy godmother. In a courtyard, over wood fires, she and her female crew are cooking up crowd-size quantities of the *botanas* (snacks) we'll eat later.

As the sun sets, the street erupts in a rollicking block party. A band plays soulful Isthmus songs as the ladies in their velvets and satins dance together. The men, some in traditional long-sleeve guayaberas and red neckerchiefs, file in hoisting cases of beer on their shoulders; at the party, they largely observe while their wives and sisters and daughters dance. It's a challenge to manage my plate of food while continually accepting beers I'm informed in no uncertain terms I am not permitted to refuse. There's a *pico de gallo* bolstered with dried shrimp; tostadas topped with an intense and addictive shrimp paste; empanadas filled with jalapeño-spiked shredded chicken—all of it powerfully savory and spicy. "When you're drinking beer, you want chile!" cries the *mayordoma*, as she takes my arm and hustles me into the street for the first of many dances that night.

The following morning, I'm late to meet Martha Jimenez Martinez, a fruit seller from Juchitán's main market who's agreed to show me how to make her specialty, oven-roasted chicken. "La fiesta," she says, with a knowing smile. She lives in an outlying *colonia* of rough wood structures along the Pan-American Highway. Her 12-year-old, Pedro, appears with a live chicken, and Martha efficiently beheads it, plucks it, and cuts it up. While parboiling the chicken, she blends guajillo chiles with garlic, achiote, and mustard to rub on it before roasting on embers; broth from the pot goes into the jalapeño salsa served on the side. I sit still for what seems like the first time in days, under a canopy of mango branches bending with fruit, and focus on eating smoky chicken off the bone. "It's good," Martha says. It's not a question. —Beth Kracklauer

Morning, Noon, and Night

Juchitán's Mercado 5 de Septiembre is one of Mexico's great markets, where a shifting ensemble of gregarious Juchitecas sells different foods depending on the hour of the day. Come for breakfast, and again in the afternoon or evening to find a fresh spread of Isthmus specialties. —B.K.



You might begin the day with briny *caldo de pescado* (fish soup), and then have a late-morning snack of *gueta binguís* (pictured at left), small cakes of masa, pumpkin seeds, and shrimp.



At midday there are many hearty dishes to choose from, from fiery stews like *pollo guisado* (pictured on page 26) to the creamy potato casserole *puré de papas* (pictured at left).



Evening is the time to enjoy *bu'pu*, a chocolate drink flavored with frangipani blossoms. Snacks like *garnachas* (pictured at left) topped with beef and cheese are served late into the night.

ON THE BACKS OF CRABS

One of my first memories is of the sound of crabs being crushed by the wheels of our moving car. I was less than five years old. It was late at night. For three days we had been traveling—my parents, my mother's siblings, and my maternal grandmother—from our home in Mexico City east to Comalcalco, in Tabasco, where my grandmother and mother were born. We'd crossed five rivers on rough-hewn ferries, little more than rafts. We'd left good roads behind and were driving on an unpaved one, steps from where waves were crashing.

I was snoozing in the backseat. The noise woke me up. I asked what it was. "They're crabs," said my uncle Gustavo, who was at the wheel. I didn't understand his answer. I knew what crabs were. My grandmother cooked them at her house in Mexico City. The legs and claws were steamed and served cold as an appetizer. The bodies, stuffed, came piping hot as a main course. Both were delicious. But what were crabs doing here?

My uncle and my grandmother explained that this was the time when crabs returned to the sea to lay their eggs, and that we were rolling over a carpet made of marching crabs. Our Goodrich tires were decimating them by the hundreds. The noise went on for what seemed an eternity.

My grandmother's stuffed crabs were one of my favorite dishes. From Tabasco her siblings sent live crabs packed in cardboard boxes, and I watched her unpack them and put them in the metal tamal-maker on the stove. I heard the crabs scratching inside, but I never saw how the stuffing was prepared. I only knew it tasted earthy and pungent, salty and sweet at the same time.

I spent many mornings watching my grandmother work in the laboratory in the back of her home—another sort of cooking. Her business was mixing ingredients, primarily herbs, for the pharmaceutical industry. That was how she earned her living (and not a bad one) after the death of her

husband. There were big cans of alcohol, filter paper, oils, extracts. Sacks of herbs and seeds were kept in the courtyards. The smell was complex and, to me, attractive.

I saw her perform culinary miracles, too. She milled chocolate from cacao pods, also sent from Tabasco. She made tamales wrapped in banana leaves, walnut and almond sweets, a pork sausage perfumed with spices. I watched my grandmother cook, but she was not interested in teaching me to do it. She used to say, "My granddaughters were not born to clean floors." Her wish was that I would go to college and have a career.

I only learned how she made the stuffed crabs later, after my daughter María was born, when I was pregnant with my Juan. I was returning to Mexico City from Villahermosa on a plane, with my little girl in my arms. My carry-on bag was stuffed with crabs. When the flight attendant came looking for the origin of the pungent smell, I put on an innocent face.

Arriving home, I parked the crabs in the bathtub and phoned my grandmother. I wanted to cook them exactly the way she did. Their smell permeated the house; some thought it more stench than smell. But I took pleasure in it, just as I enjoyed the peculiar odors from my grandmother's laboratory.

I followed her instructions closely. First, I steamed the crabs, hearing the familiar scratching in the pot. Then I emptied their bodies and claws, extracting every bit of meat. For the filling, I chopped onion and a bit of garlic, and fried them in olive oil. Once the onion changed color, I added green olives, capers, raisins, almonds, salt, fresh herbs, and finally the crabmeat. I stuffed the bodies, sealed them with egg whites and bread crumbs, and fried them just long enough to make them golden and beautiful. And yes: The taste of those crabs, like the sound of them under the wheels of our car, was something unforgettable. —Carmen Boullosa, author of *Leaving Tabasco* (Grove Press, 2002); translated from Spanish by María del Carmen Pottage



Two friends eat *jaibas enchipot-ladas*, pan-fried crabs in chipotle sauce (see page 68 for a recipe), at a seaside restaurant in Tabasco.



THE PRIDE OF PUEBLA



Pueblan home cook Luz Maria Leonor Gonzales serves chicken in *mole poblano* (see [page 84](#) for a recipe) with a side of *arroz a la Mexicana*, Mexican red rice (see [page 100](#) for a recipe).

TODD COLEMAN

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Tomatillo

Anise Seeds

Canela

On a recent trip to Puebla, I paid a visit to a storefront mill called a *molino*. There I met Luz Maria Leonor Gonzalez, a lively mother of eight grown children who told me to call her Doña Luchita. It was Mother's Day, an occasion fit for *mole poblano*. The spicy-sweet, sienna-colored sauce is the preeminent holiday dish in this small colonial city

85 miles southeast of Mexico City. Housewives were lined up with buckets of ingredients (some pictured at left) they had prepared to be crushed to a paste. Through the rotary grinders went mulato, pasilla, and ancho chiles; spices like anise and coriander; sesame seeds, almonds, and peanuts; burnt tortillas, stale bread, even animal crackers, for thickening; and, for sweetness, brown sugar, raisins, chocolate, and ripe plantains.

Doña Luchita had been up into the wee hours frying her ingredients to intensify their flavors. I followed her home and watched her thin the paste with stock and simmer it. She made *envueltos* (wraps)—rolled tortillas topped with shredded chicken, onion, and mole. Her sauce had a fruity flavor, trailed by a mellow burn. Along with Doña Luchita's cheery ribbing—"We don't waste!" she cried, pointing at an *envuelto* left on my plate. "Who's going to eat this?"—it put me in a festive mood.

Such was *mole poblano*'s original purpose. "An important person was coming, and the nuns made this for him," Doña Luchita told me, repeating an oft-told tale. But though the dish is said to have been invented at Puebla's 17th-century Convent of Santa Rosa, its name derives from *molli*, the Nahuatl word for sauce. *Mole poblano*'s spices, nuts, and fruit arrived with the Spanish, but its chiles and tomatoes are native. Served everywhere now—mostly over chicken—it has become a national dish, an expression of Mexico's mestizo culture.

I got a taste of mole's past in the tin-roofed outdoor kitchen of Maria Gabriella Sandre de Tlapaltotoli, a woman with both Nahuatl and French last names who lives in Cholula, an ancient town on Puebla's outskirts. Sandre, an in-law of a chef friend of mine, had gathered relatives to pitch in on a batch of mole for the family. Each woman had a job: sorting chiles; charring tomatoes; slaughtering a turkey to serve with the sauce; simmering the mole in a washtub-size *cazuela* set over a blazing fire.

"This is mole del pueblo, not mole poblano," Sandre insisted, noting that each pueblo, or village, has its own recipe. This version, made without chocolate and with smoky chipotles, was earthier and more savory than Doña Luchita's. It took two entire days for a small army to prepare; were this an occasion like a wedding, they might have cooked enough for a thousand. "To make mole is a ritual," Sandre's sister-in-law Maria del Refugio said as she stirred. "It's so complicated, but it's special."

She explained that she knew the mole was done "when the oil on its surface forms a mirror." As if when she looks at it, she sees her own face: partly indigenous, partly European, proudly Mexican. —Betsy Andrews

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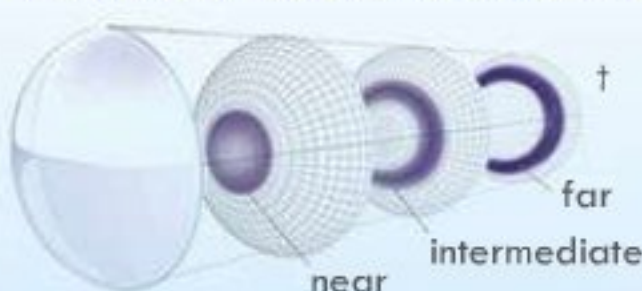
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DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

In Jalisco a family comes together, and occasionally clashes, over a beef stew like no other

THIS MEMORY spans all of my life. We could place it in 1980, at the baptism of one of my cousins. Or in 1995, at the wedding of another cousin. Or even in 2007, at my first child's baptism. I could also relate this memory in the future tense, in 2016 or 2028. Every time my family has something to celebrate, we kill a calf. Its meat, wrapped in succulent blades of maguey leaf and steamed slowly over a wood fire, all but melts into a delicious stew called *birria*. This dish is the pride of my home state, Jalisco.

I have skipped something here, and it is not casual: It is the moment of the calf's sacrifice. Cieneguilla, my uncle Mario's ranch in the highlands, is where my family celebrates our parties. It is a dairy farm, and thus the slaughtered ones are always males, born by mistake within a system in which only females can be productive. As a kid, I was always at home playing soccer or watching TV the day before the celebrations, when a ranch worker stung the heart of the chosen one with an instrument like an ice pick. It must be done at least twelve hours before cooking the meat, to give the carcass time to bleed out completely. Only once did I witness the sacrifice, and what I remember, more than the blood or the brutal indifference of the act, is the laughter of the workers during the gutting of the animal, the jokes about handling the testicles, those classic and sad homophobic jokes so common in Mexico.

This memory is made of dust, the dust of the unpaved road we



needed to travel from our town, Lagos de Moreno, to get to the ranch, long before the construction of the current road. The monotonous semiarid landscape of Los Altos de Jalisco: acacias, cactus, and the maguey plants that are *birria's* essence. Its cut blades, stripped of thorns, washed and charred, line the interior of the vessel where the calf is cooked. On my uncle's ranch, 50-gallon metal drums are used; water is poured on the bottom and a grill is placed

inside, making an unbeatable makeshift steamer. The largest pieces of meat are placed in the bottom, the head in the center, and the small pieces on top. The top is then covered with more maguey leaves, so that the calf is thoroughly wrapped, and the whole thing is placed on a rack over a wood fire. You need to have a fire of medium intensity, one that is constant but never angry. Tightly close the steamer—a huge stone set on top is the perfect solution—and

wait, depending on the weight and age of the animal, between two-and-a-half and four hours.

My family's *birria* is eaten with handmade tortillas, and with my Aunt Celia's famous sauce. It's just a tomato sauce cooked with chile de árbol, which, once blended, is mixed with salt, oregano, onions, and cilantro. The big secret is why Aunt Celia's sauce tastes like no other in the world, including those of my mother and the rest of my aunts, the flavor progressing in its particular way from herb to onion to the sweetness and burn of the chile. It's not an irrelevant secret: In Mexico you should never underestimate the power of sauces as a source of family rancor.

These are meals with a mass audience, with a never-ending line of ten to fifteen people at the kitchen's entrance. Children—and picky adults—eat the meat from the legs and the back, while the rest of the adults save ourselves for the moment when the beautiful calf skull arises from the huge drum, holding within the most treasured delicacies: the tongue, cheeks, eyes, and brains. It's a small reward for so many stomachs, so the negotiations are always difficult. I still remember my childhood's disgust when I saw my father and my uncles ingesting those parts. And to think that today I wouldn't mind forever falling out with a relative over them. In my family, growing up means learning to fight for the head. —Juan Pablo Villalobos, author of *Down the Rabbit Hole* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012)



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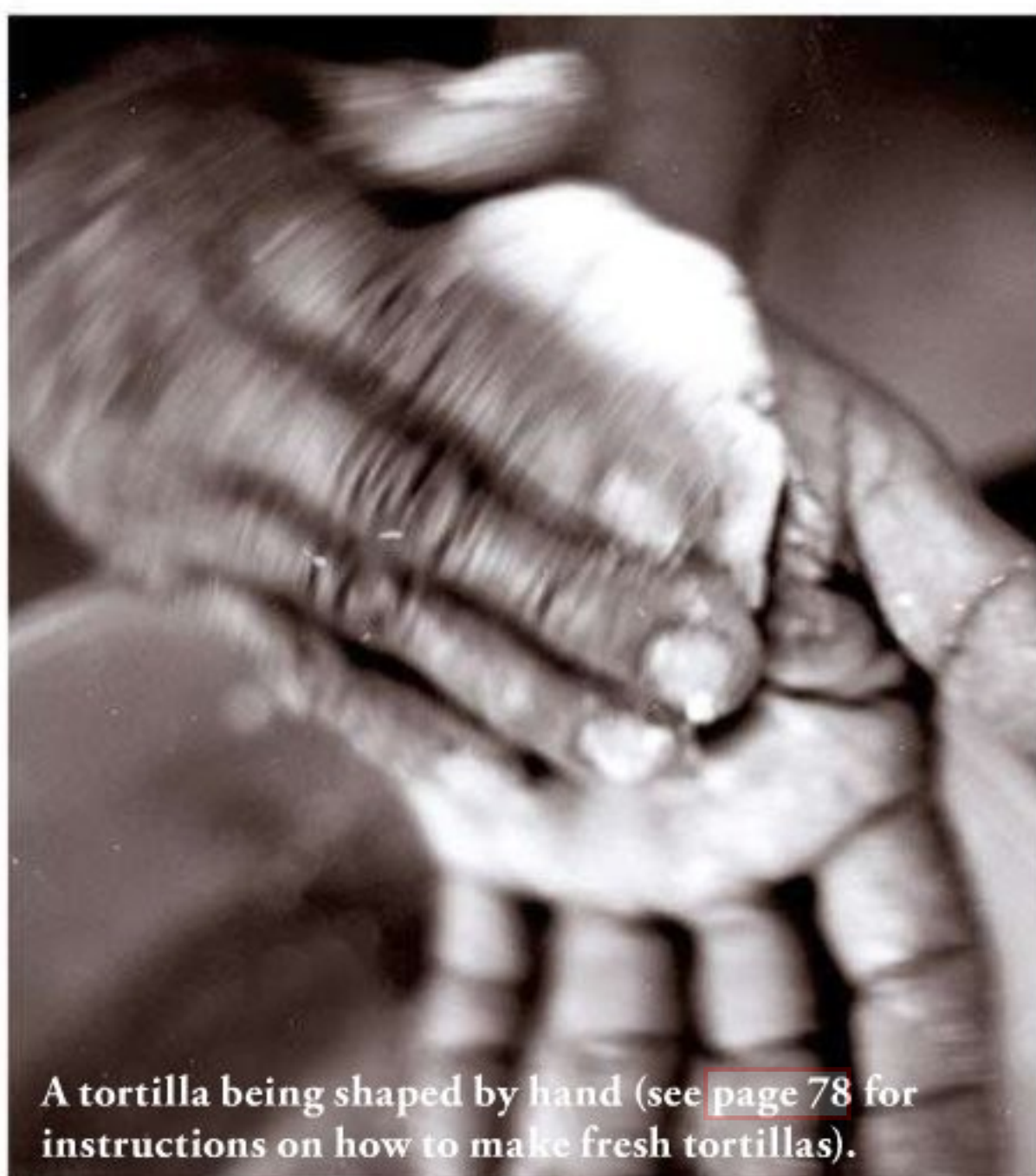
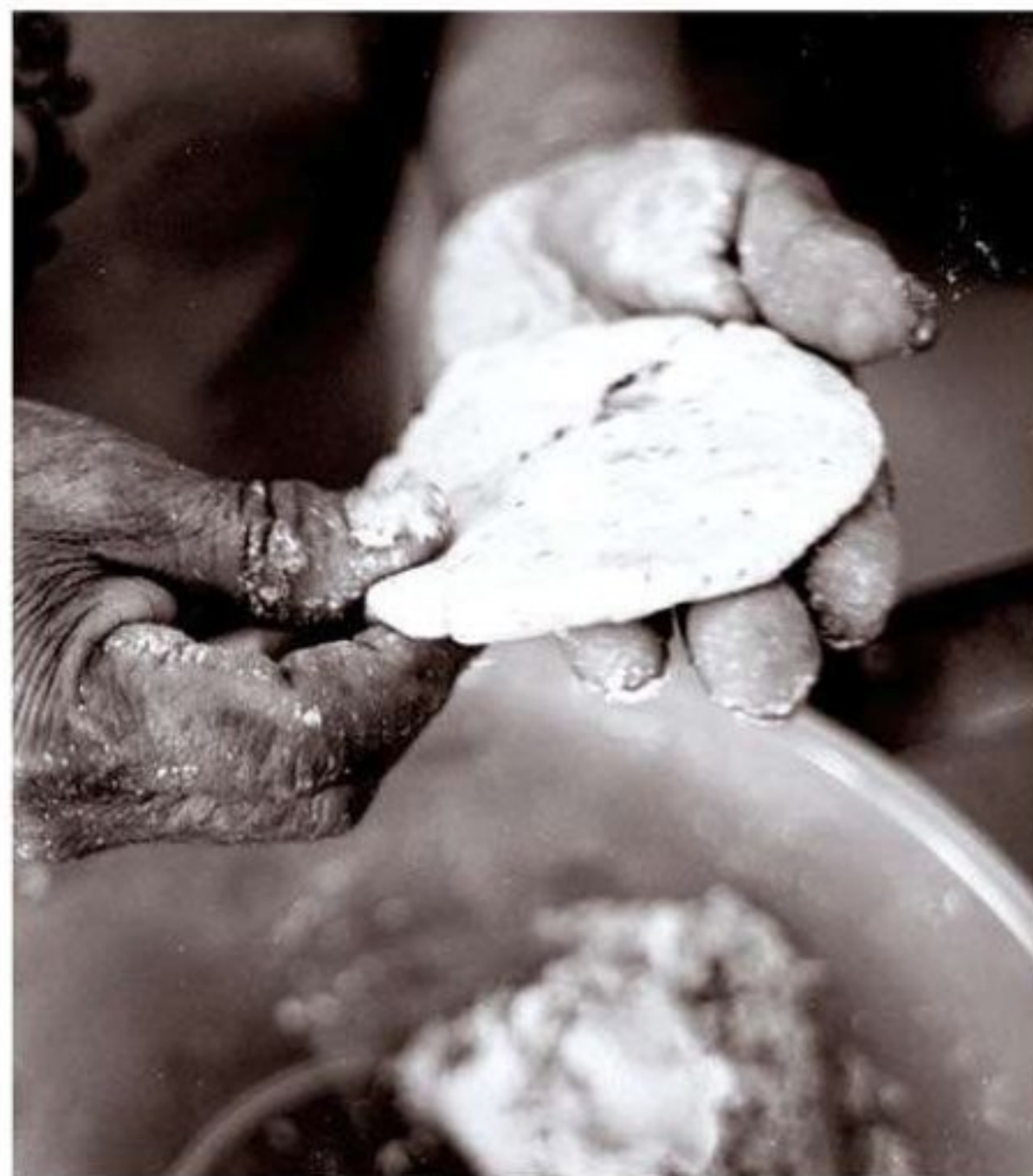
You see them outside churches all over Mexico—sisters from local convents selling home-baked sweets, a sort of eggnog spiked with rum or brandy called *rompope*, and assorted spiritual tracts and talismans. A few years ago, one of these sisters basically rescued me. I was driving down the highway on my way to Mexico City and witnessed a horrific car crash. After tracking down an ambulance and spending considerable time at the scene, I could do no more to help. By the time I arrived in Mexico City, the trauma had fully registered; I was on the verge of collapse. And there she was, with a smile for everyone who passed. When that smile settled on me, my eyes filled with tears. I'm not a drinker, but some instinct compelled me to reach for one of her bottles of *rompope*. It was strong and sweet, a nectar and a consolation at a moment when I needed it profoundly. Sister, wherever you are, thank you.

—James Oseland

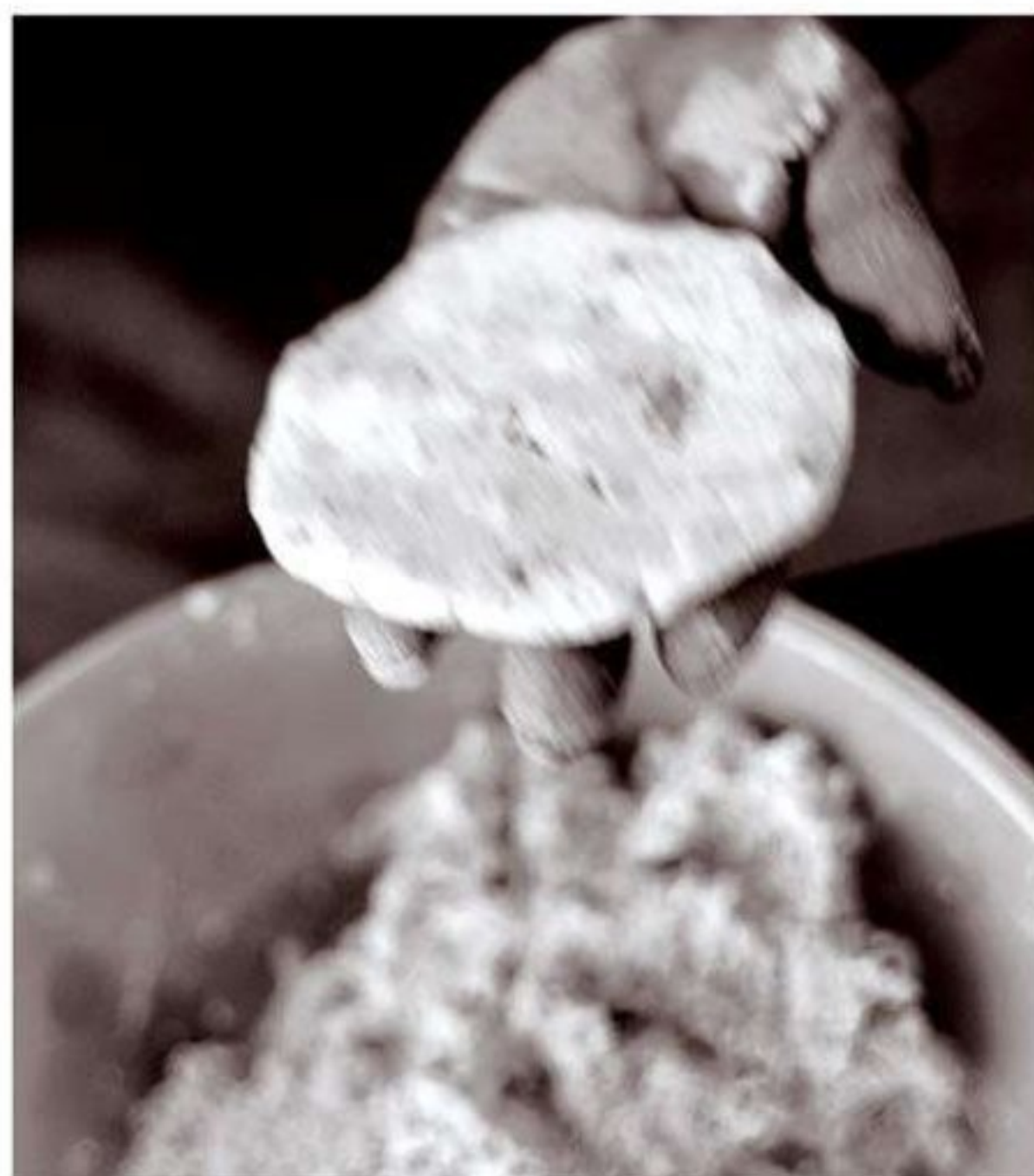


Nuns sell religious articles, the eggnog-like drink *rompope*, and baked goods on a Mexico City street.





A tortilla being shaped by hand (see page 78 for instructions on how to make fresh tortillas).

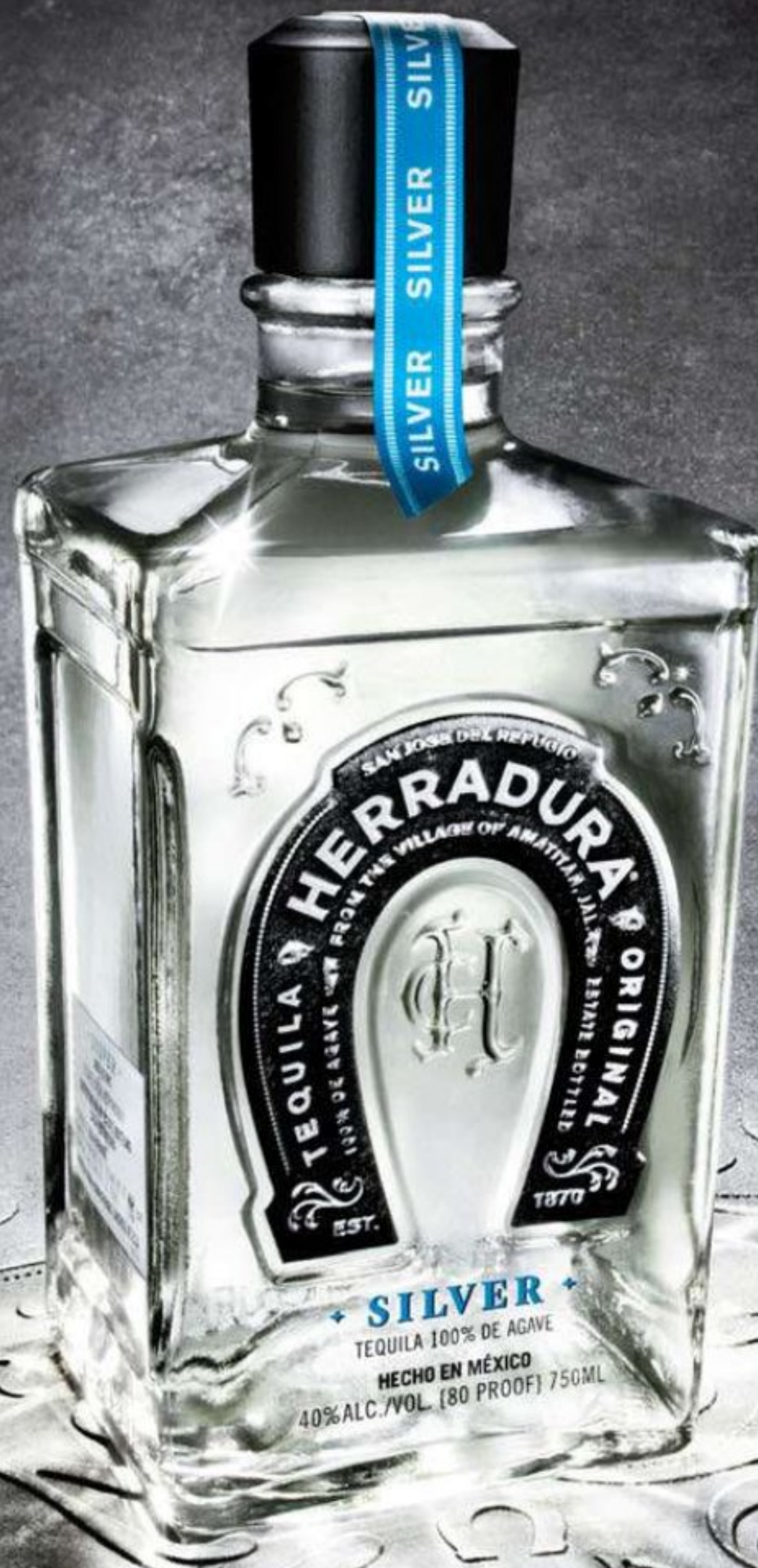


THE MOST ELEMENTAL OF FOODS

The *tortillería* near our home in Mexico City was dark and tiny, with a machine that spat fresh tortillas out onto a conveyor belt, which carried the hot, puffy disks to a counter up front. The ladies who worked there would wrap a kilo in the cloth I'd brought with me. They were steamy and almost too hot to touch. As soon as I got home, I would sprinkle salt on one, roll it very tightly, and squeeze it so it stuck together. Our nanny nicknamed it *pegada*, the word for "stuck." I miss *tortillas pegadas*. I don't know if I ever went a day without eating tortillas in Mexico. It's the country's most cherished food. I like to think it was a huge moment when Mesoamericans figured out how to unlock corn's nutrients through nixtamalization, the soaking of the grain in a slaked lime solution that makes the corn more digestible and easier to grind into the substance called masa, the base for corn tortillas. Of course, tortillas are different everywhere. There are wheat-flour tortillas, beloved in the north, and thicker tortillas in the Yucatán (pictured at left) that are made, often by hand, from corn washed so thoroughly that the grain becomes as white and soft as wheat flour. In Mexico City, the tortillas are rougher, with bits of corn still visible. When you spend so much time with a foodstuff, you begin to know it intimately; every household develops its own quirky ways with the tortilla. My favorite innovation was my grandmother's *tacos de barriga*, "belly tacos." She and I would go to the *tortillería*, and as the tortillas came out onto the conveyor belt, she'd take a knife and cut off the thin layer that puffs up during cooking, the part that looks like a pudgy belly. She stuffed these tortillas with chicken, rolled them up, and fried them. They were so fine, like puff pastry. From a very young age, I knew that a tortilla could be anything. —Roberto Santibañez, chef-owner of New York City's *Fonda* restaurants and author of *Tacos, Tortas, and Tamales* (Wiley, 2012)



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BREAKFAST AT THE BORDER

Two worlds converge over a platter of torn tortillas and salsa verde

OVER BREAKFAST IN TIJUANA in 2010, the two sides of me came face to face. I was there, a Mexican-American poet visiting from Brooklyn, with the novelist Cristina Rivera Garza, who teaches at the University of California, San Diego. It was my first trip to the area, so we were sightseeing across the border. Cristina, a double agent of sorts, keeps two cell phones, two wallets, and homes in both cities. We were overnighing at her house on the Tijuana coast.

In the morning, I took a walk on the beach. Cristina had told me to head north, toward the border. She would meet me at the fence and then take me to her favorite breakfast hangout, El Yogurt Place, whose semicircular dining room offers panoramic views of the international divide.

When I got to the border, Cristina was waiting for me next to a puzzle of iron rails, some bent or broken, some altogether missing. Affixed to the fence, which stretched about twenty feet into the surf, were two signs: “danger objects under water” and its outrageously imprecise translation, “*pilegro fierros bato del auga*,” which, in English, would be something like “nadder metals bewo watre.” People find this fence so unimposing that they even climb over for kicks, Christina said.

We headed toward breakfast. On our way, we passed Friendship Park where, until recently, family and friends were allowed to touch each other, and even share food, through a wire fence. In 2009, the completion of a 21-foot-tall barrier here had compromised that park’s purpose.

At El Yogurt Place, we sat in a banquette and looked out onto the palimpsest of property lines. The leafy American side appeared uninhabited for miles, while the edge of urban Tijuana was jammed up against the U.S. I had flown here from New York City, my home for almost two decades.

Born to a Mexican father and an American mother, I grew up in Mexico City, but we summered in Maine. I travel back and forth to Mexico a few times a year, but I struggle with the transitions. In my psyche, both worlds remain achingly remote. Now, I was witnessing their ambivalent convergence.

I dug into my plate of *chilaquiles*, yesterday’s tortillas—stale and torn but fried and reborn with a tangy, gently spicy tomatillo salsa and a dollop of *crema*. A humble but filling meal, *chilaquiles* is born of an imperative to not waste food. Like refried beans, those gratifying leftovers that are spread on day-old bread and smothered in cheese and salsa for *molletes*, another of my breakfast favorites, *chilaquiles* is redeemed by its ingenuity and deliciousness. As I savored each bite, I was struck by a feeling of connection. My eyes were trained on the greener grass on the other side of the fence, but my taste buds held me here, in Mexico. —*Mónica de la Torre, a poet based in New York City, whose latest book of poems is Four (Switchback Books, 2012)*



Molletes, Mexican bean and cheese sandwiches (see [page 86](#) for a recipe).





A Sanborns server holds a dish of *enchiladas suizas* (see page 95 for a recipe).

SAUCY DISH

One amazing place to eat in Mexico City is actually in a department store. Sanborns reminds me of Woolworth's, and in fact, it has American roots; the chain grew out of a Mexico City pharmacy opened in 1903 by Walter and Frank Sanborn, brothers from California. To encourage employees to stay at work during the midday siesta time, the brothers served them lunch, and the in-store restaurants evolved from that effort.

Today, Sanborns has 174 outlets, but the one in the capital's Centro Histórico is unique. It's set inside a spectacular 16th-century residence covered in blue-and-white tiles. Inside, amid the magazines, clothing, and housewares, there's a coffee shop and a cocktail lounge, and then there's the dining room, located in a soaring courtyard festooned in murals and carved stone.

Whenever I'm in Mexico City, I come here for *enchiladas suizas*. Unlike Stateside renditions, where the sauce is tomato-based and sweet, Sanborns' chicken-stuffed enchiladas are served swimming in a cream-enriched tomatillo sauce and blanketed in bubbly tangy Chihuahua cheese. They're tart, salty, soupy, and unimaginably rich—and their outsize flavors manage to stay in balance with one another.

These blockbuster *suizas* are also the originals, created in 1950 by a Sanborns chef who added cream to *enchiladas en salsa verde*. The gooey dish was dubbed *suiza* ("Swiss") after that dairy-centric cuisine. Along with other Mexican and American-style dishes—club sandwiches, *carne asada*, and hamburgers—the *enchiladas suizas* are served by waitresses dressed in cartoonish riffs on indigenous garb. The uniform's outsize triangular collar and striped skirt are so iconic that *amigos* of mine have worn them to costume parties. But it's not just the subject of parody. Sanborns is a real part of Mexican life—beloved as a one-stop shop for everything you need, including a rich and comforting meal. —Todd Coleman



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GRATEFUL DEAD

On the street leading toward the Church of San Andrés Apóstol in the village of Mixquic, an hour southeast of downtown Mexico City, vendors tempted a festive crowd with the hominy-rich stew *pozole*, and with radishes, fried grasshoppers, and pillowy *pan de muertos*, Spanish for “bread of the dead,” a sweet holiday treat. Children laughed around me, begging for cotton candy and sugar skulls. Mariachis strummed. The sun was setting as everyone proceeded through the gates of the churchyard’s walled cemetery. I followed, too.

On the Day of the Dead, the veil between the worlds of the deceased and the living becomes more transparent; only then may spirits press against that elastic fabric to savor the essence of tequila poured into a glass or a cigarette burnt to ash. To mark the way from the underworld, families across Mexico create folksy *ofrendas* (altars) piled with spiced black beans, tamales, and other foods, which serve as the spirits’ earthly signposts. In Mixquic, families sit bundled next to headstones

covered with marigolds during a candlelight vigil called *La Alumbrada* (The Illumination), awaiting the return of their lost loved ones. For me, a visitor, it was my sister I longed for, taken suddenly and too young.

Weaving around the crowded graves late into the chilly November night, I was invited to slug fiery mezcal from a communal bottle passed by cheerfully drunk brothers. Another family solemnly shared a home-baked *pan de muertos*. It was coarse and chewy, with a dusting of sugar on the brown crust. This generosity to a stranger in their midst seemed to me a sacrament of sorts. A stinging fog of copal incense rose from clay burners to swirl eerily around our heads. And before dawn, when the church bells chimed, throughout Mixquic, the aromas and flavors of proffered food faded as phantom travelers, sated, fled once again into their mystical world.

“Come back,” I whispered. “Come back.” —Shane Mitchell, *SAVEUR* contributing editor



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QUEEN OF THE YUCATAN

Just outside Mérida, the capital of the Yucatán, I drive toward the home of my friend, Margarita “Wiggie” Andrews. I exit the car and enter her sun-flooded kitchen, which is filled with the bustle of dinner being prepared. This time, I have come not to see Wiggie, but Transita Varguez Pacheco, her live-in cook for more than 50 years.

I find Transita, a petite 78-year-old, working alongside her sister, Ernestina, and granddaughter Azul, directing them in her native Mayan, punctuated with Spanish words. In the Yucatán, both languages are often spoken, interchangeably. The Maya, an ancient Mesoamerican people, have occupied the peninsula for millennia. Their heritage is everywhere, but perhaps nowhere more than in the food. This is why I’m here. I’ve always been fascinated by the region’s cooking, and Transita has invited me to watch her make tonight’s meal.

The vast limestone peninsula that is the Yucatán seems worlds away from Mexico City, where I grew up. It’s the country’s easternmost point, physically and spiritually closer to Havana than to Mexico’s capital. Though the native foods are the same as those in the rest of Mexico—squash, corn, tomatoes, chiles—it’s in the Yucatán where the Maya mastered the cultivation and cooking of them. I admire the region’s excellent tamales and pumpkin-seed salsas; I crave the bold *recados*—pastes made with chiles, herbs, and spices—that are rubbed on or stirred into all kinds of dishes.

Though its roots are Mayan, Yucatecan cuisine is influenced by all over. Its remote location meant that Europe, not Mexico, was the main trade partner, and Old World ingredients were adapted to New World dishes. When the Spanish conquered the Yucatán in the 16th century, for instance, sour orange was introduced. It came to define emblematic foods such as *cochinilla pibil*, pulled pork that is

tenderized in sour orange juice and garnished with onions pickled in the same. It’s also essential to *pollo en escabeche oriental*, or “pickled chicken,” the dish Transita is most celebrated for, which she is making here today.

Transita manages her crew like a restaurant chef. “A tortear!” (Make the tortillas!), she tells Ernestina, without taking her eyes off the chicken she is rubbing with a *recado* made from oregano, black pepper, cumin, cinnamon, garlic, chiles, and plenty of sour orange juice. Transita then moves into the yard, where she chars some chiles over smoldering coals, briefly grills the chicken, and transfers them to a large pot. As the pot cooks over the coals, the sweet-spicy aroma is intoxicating.

As the dinner guests arrive, they stop by the kitchen to greet Transita with hugs and kisses. Though it’s hard to believe, Transita confides, “I didn’t really know how to cook when I started.” She was hired at 16, without previous experience. With no idea how to feed a household, she went to the market and watched other women shop, bought the same things they did, and asked how to cook them. When she returned home, the first dish she prepared was *puchero*, an elaborate stew of chicken, beef, pork, and vegetables. “They loved it!” she says, clapping at the memory.

When the meal commences in the dining room, I stay in the kitchen with Transita, Ernestina, and Azul. They serve the first few courses, and the plates come back clean. But when they send out the *pollo en escabeche*, we hear whoops and cheers coming from the dining room. In this moment, Transita slides me a plate. The chicken is smoky and spicy, fruity yet tart. It’s extraordinary. As dinner wraps up, each guest comes to the kitchen to thank Transita and her crew. Someone calls her Queen of the Yucatán, and this is how I will remember her. —Mauricio Velázquez de León’s last article for *SAVEUR* was “South of the Border” (April 2011)



Transita Varguez Pacheco, 78, in the 18th-century hacienda near Mérida where she works.









Two classic dishes from the Yucatán: *Huevos Motuleños*, eggs in tortillas with ham and peas. Facing page: *pollo pibil*, Yucatecan chicken stewed in achiote. (See [pages 84](#) and [86](#) for recipes.)



Caldo Xóchitl con flor de calabaza, squash blossom soup



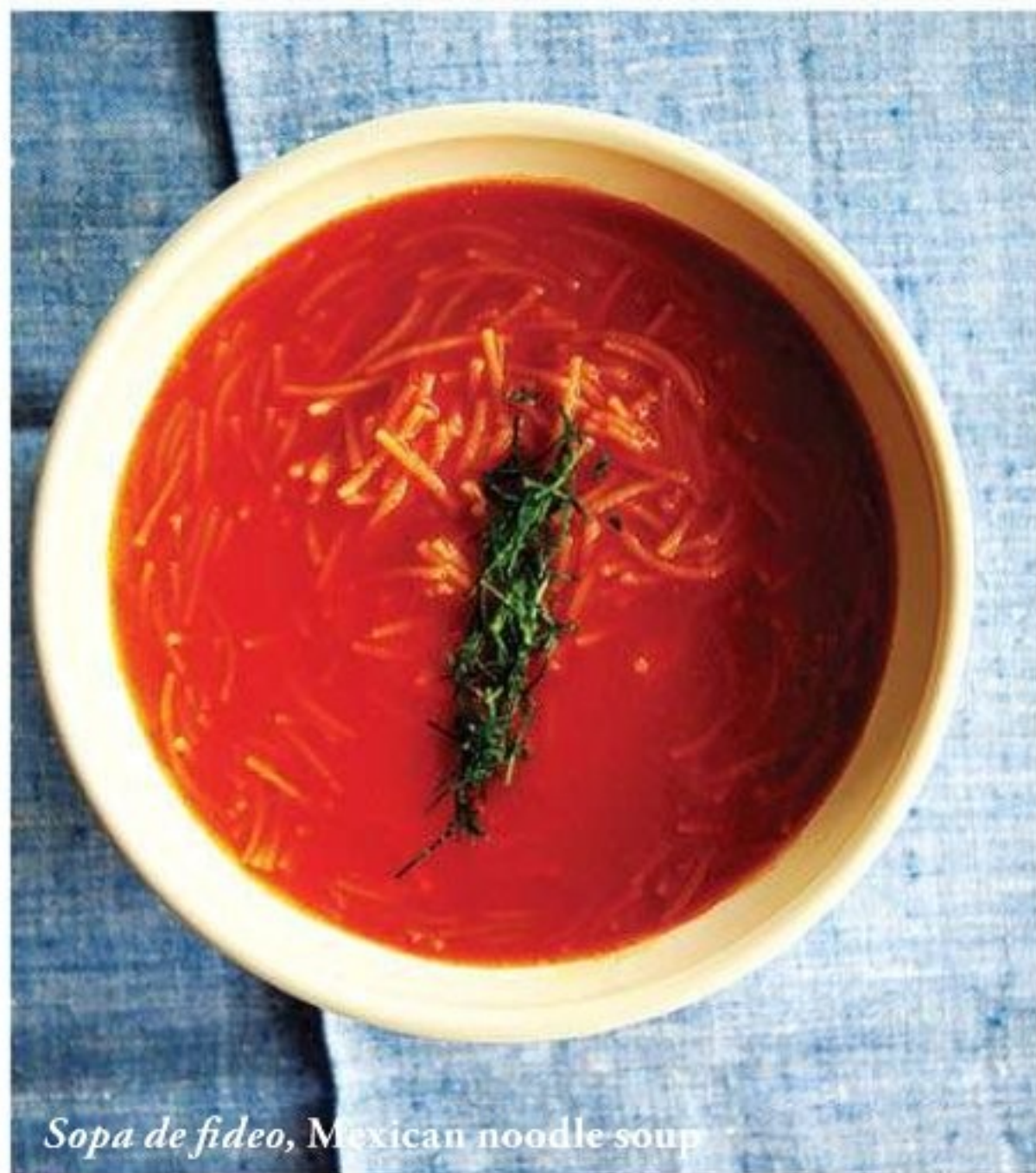
Sopa de chile ancho, ancho chile soup with avocado



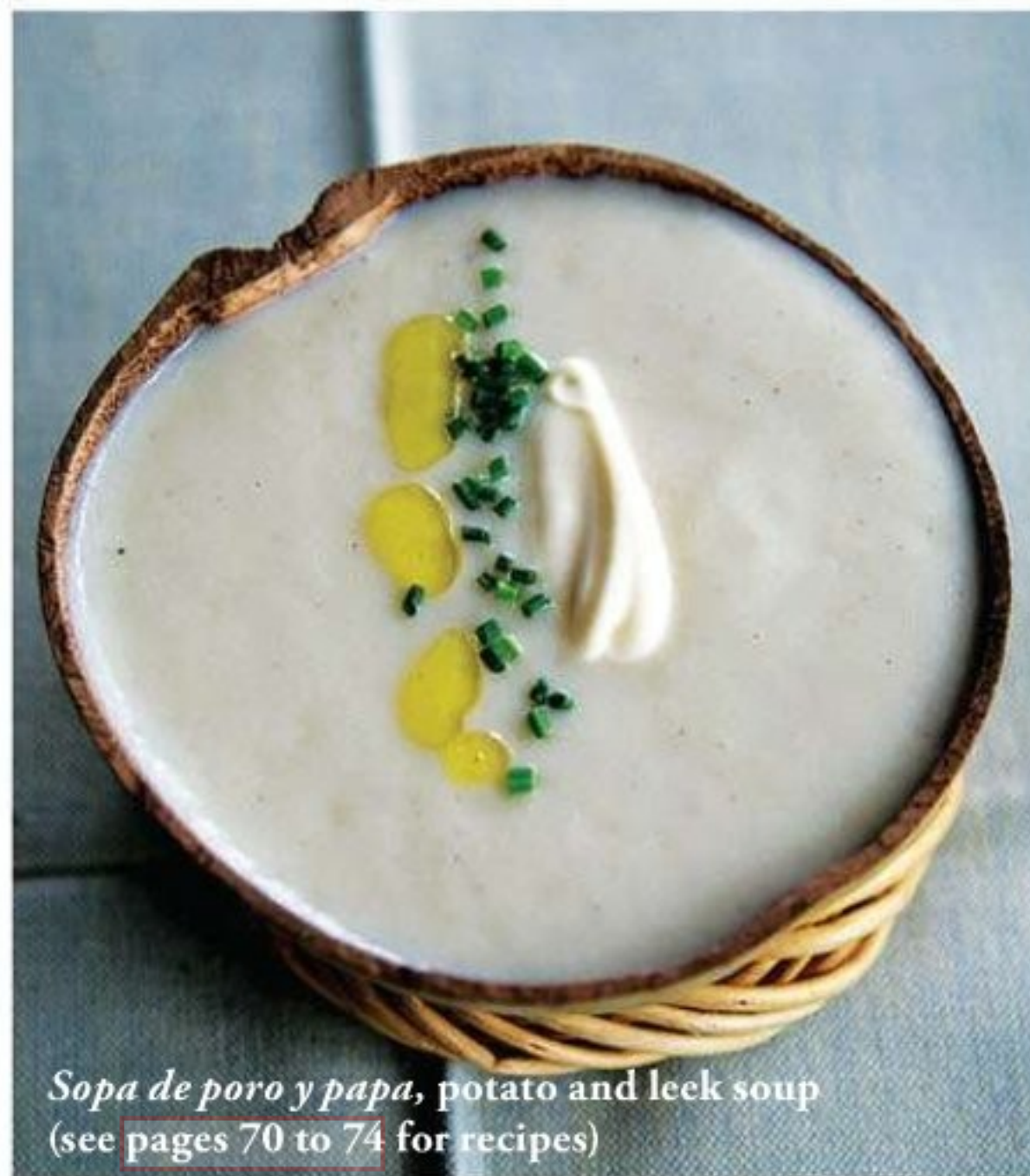
Sopa de frijol, black bean soup



Sopa fría de aguacate, chilled avocado soup



Sopa de fideo, Mexican noodle soup

Sopa de poro y papa, potato and leek soup
(see pages 70 to 74 for recipes)

SOUP COUNTRY

There are so many ways to get to know Mexico, but for me, the country is best understood through its soups. We're ancient: Every home cook here has a recipe for *caldo Xóchitl con flor de calabaza*, a squash-blossom soup named for the Aztec goddess of flowers that harks back to when the capital city was still known as Tenochtitlán. We're authentic: Regional soups like *sopa fría de aguacate*, a serrano chile-spiked cold avocado soup from the south Pacific coast, make the most of the distinct flavors, ingredients, and cooking styles specific to each state. (Even national favorites, like the bean soup *sopa de frijol*, evolve as you traverse the country: It's made with pintos in the north, black beans in the south.) We're international: One of the country's most beloved soups, *sopa de fideo*, fine pasta noodles in a rich tomato broth, was born of Italian immigration to Mexico; a vichyssoise-like potato and leek soup, meanwhile, nods to France. We're cosmopolitan: At restaurants in Mexico City, chefs outdo one another with elegant soups like *sopa de chile ancho*, a silken broth of pan-toasted, puréed chiles that is garnished with crisp-fried tortilla strips, julienned pasilla chile, a drizzle of *crema*, and slivers of avocado. No matter where you are, a meal isn't really a meal without soup—whether it's the warming *consomé* served at the beginning of a meal, or the brothy pinto beans that round it out—and here, soup can even be found in the streets. Some say the soul of Mexico is in the soups of the streets and the markets, where vendors sell homespun brews from their stalls, ladling out *caldo de res*, a hearty beef stew, topped with a confetti of cilantro and chopped raw onion. In Mexico, soups are basic. They comfort. They put us at ease and nourish our souls. They sustain us, and wherever we find ourselves, once a bowl of soup is in our hands, we're home. —Patricia Quintana, chef-owner of *Izote* in Mexico City, and author of *The Taste of Mexico* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1986)

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BURRITOS, UNWRAPPED

The curious evolution of a borderland classic

THE DRIVE FROM Anaheim, California, to Jerez, Zacatecas, seemed to me like a long, unnecessary detour. But nearly every Christmas break during my childhood in the 1980s, my parents would load us up in our Ford Ranger and make the trek to their home city. The truck would rumble eastbound on I-10 until we hit El Paso, then make a dramatic turn south through Juárez, and into burrito heaven.

Upon entering Juárez, we'd join the traffic on what's now called Carretera Federal 45, and reach the town of Villa Ahumada—"smoked village" being an appropriate name, considering all the cooking that goes on there. Here, roadside stalls, sit-down restaurants, and street vendors sell burritos of every stripe—vegetarian (*rajas con queso*, chiles with cheese); spiced ground beef called *picadillo*; even hot dogs stewed with salsa, hilariously known as *burritos de weenie*—all rolled into a flour wrapper folded in such a way so that the ends are not tucked in, better to portion out the bites with filling and those of pure tortilla.

It was a great pit stop for the family, but especially fun for my parents. Whereas their Americanized children had grown up on burritos, the ones in Ahumada were the first my folks actually enjoyed. The burrito to them was as alien as a Korean taco; being from Zacatecas, where corn tortillas are the norm, they hadn't even tasted the flour variety until migrating to California in the 1960s. The American obsession



with the food bewildered them—the ones we ate in the States were as Mexican as Doritos. But in Villa Ahumada, my parents were happy to feed on burritos because, well, that's what everybody ate. To them, Ahumada was the place where America became Mexico, and Mexico became America; the burrito was the food that embodied that in-between place.

If the taco is the ambassador of Mexican food in the United States, then the burrito is the eternal misfit. All sorts of gastronomic sins get committed in

its name: It's stuffed with french fries in San Diego and deli pastrami in Los Angeles; wrapped around a hamburger and smothered with chili in Denver. It's the most Americanized of Mexican dishes, one so *pocho* (slang for a Mexican who has gone gringo) that many gourmards incorrectly point out that the burrito is in fact an American creation.

But in the borderlands of Mexico, the burrito has reigned for nearly a century as a simple, austere beauty reflective of its sparse environment. It's here that the

meal reaches its apotheosis, not as a tortilla wrapped around an avalanche of mush, but as a dish in which each part complements the others: an expertly toasted flour tortilla, with just enough filling so that it can be tightly wrapped to the girth of a child's wrist. The ideal iteration is more graceful than gargantuan.

Even so, no one knows who invented the burrito. Historians have traced the term as far back as 1895, to central Mexico, where then as now it signified a tortilla rolled around ingredients. But today, the burrito exists in earnest only in northern Mexico. This is the homeland of the flour tortilla, and from this universal vessel, the regions of northern Mexico create burritos with their own homegrown ingredients. In Baja California, burritos feature fresh fish from the coast; in the Sonoran plains, *carne seca* (sun-dried beef) reigns; in Chihuahua, *queso menonita* (a pale yellow cheese made by Mennonite colonies), goes into nearly all of them.

But the ultimate burrito trail remains Carretera 45. I haven't gone down that road in decades, partly because my parents can now afford to fly to Zacatecas, but really because the narco wars have soured that trek for us. But I'm an optimist, and plan to take my parents back to Ahumada one day, for a reminder of the time when those burritos were the first sign that we were on our way home. —Gustavo Arellano, author of *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (Scribner, 2012)



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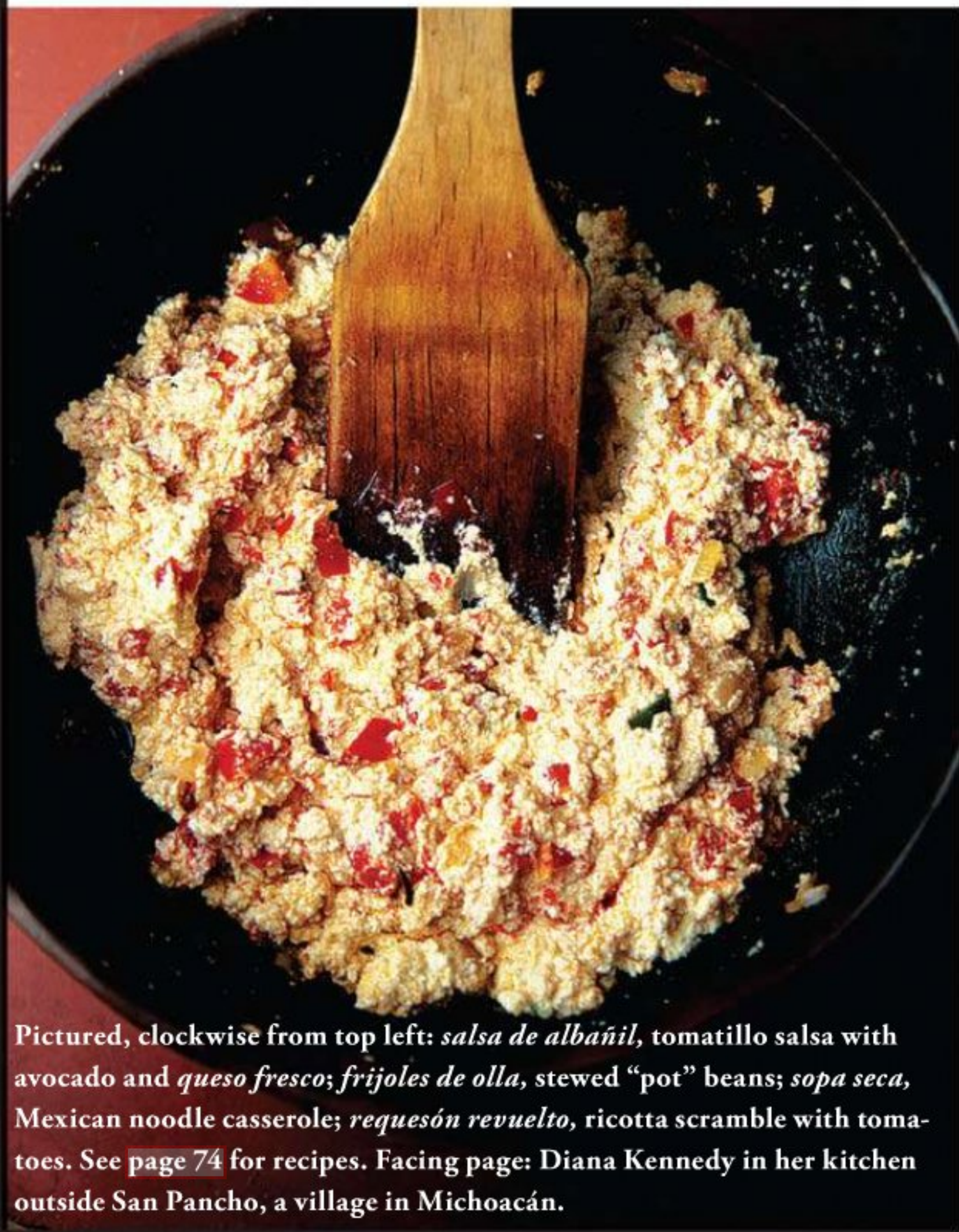
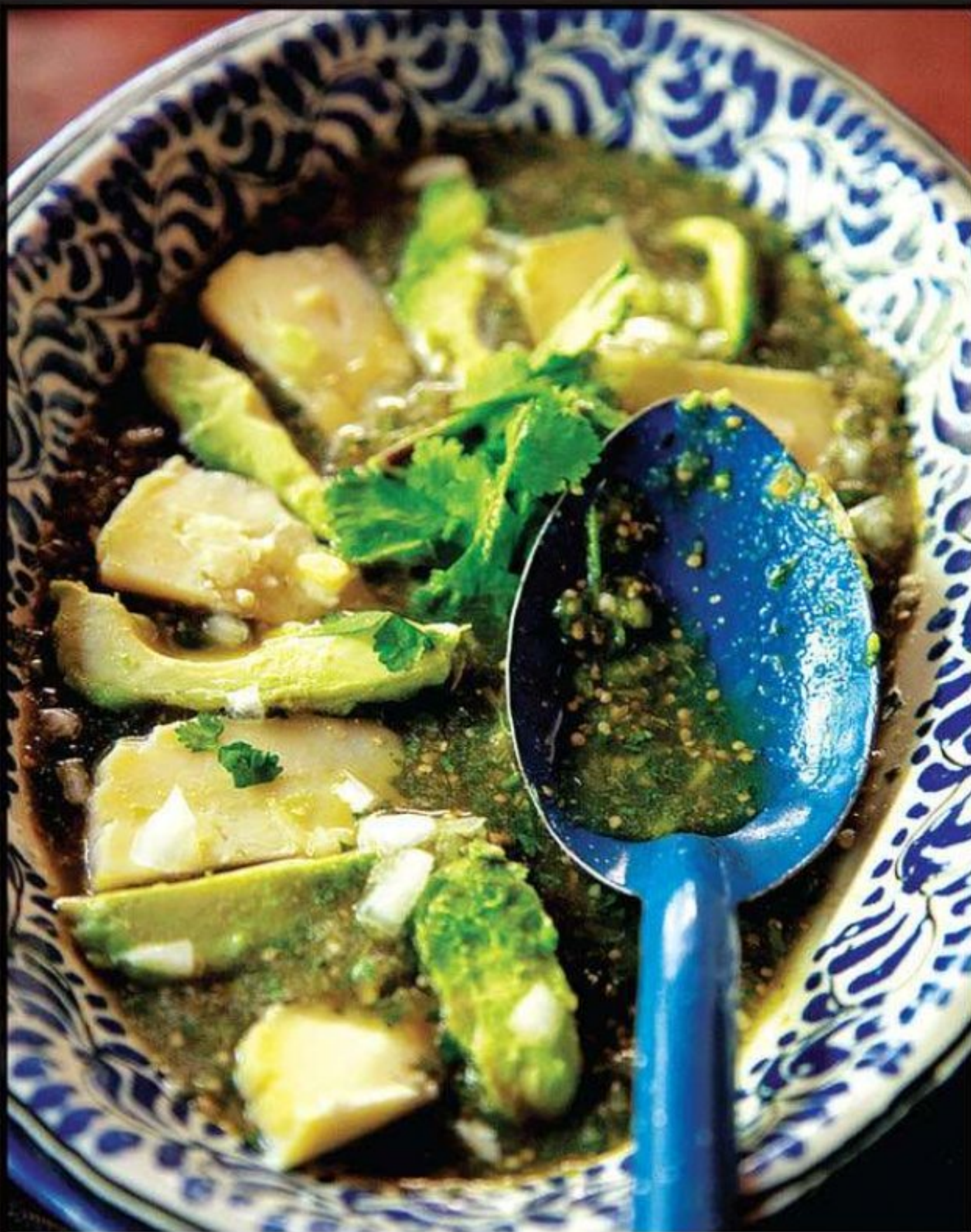
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THE EXPAT

Diana Kennedy's greatest gift to Mexico is her outsider's perspective



Pictured, clockwise from top left: *salsa de albahail*, tomatillo salsa with avocado and *queso fresco*; *frijoles de olla*, stewed “pot” beans; *sopa seca*, Mexican noodle casserole; *requesón revuelto*, ricotta scramble with tomatoes. See page 74 for recipes. Facing page: Diana Kennedy in her kitchen outside San Pancho, a village in Michoacán.



IT MUST BE SHEER REFLEX BY NOW, THIS THING THAT SHE HAS SPENT A HALF-CENTURY DOING: COLLECTING RECIPES FROM COOKS ACROSS MEXICO

The Julia Child of Mexico? Oh dear, what nonsense.” Diana Kennedy is making her way briskly across the small central square of Zitácuaro, a town of about 150,000 in the pine-forested mountains of northeast Michoacán state. “Of course I’m flattered by the comparison,” she adds, “but it’s totally inaccurate.” I have just arrived to spend a few days at Kennedy’s home, in the countryside not far from here, observing the British-born authority on Mexican cuisine—renowned cook, ethnographer, naturalist, and perfectionist—at work. The slight 89-year-old calls out to me over her shoulder as she goes; it’s all I can do to keep up. We advance into the maze of the covered market, and vendors to the left and to the right call out to Kennedy as she moves from stall to stall, vocally appraising what’s on offer, in a crisp British accent that seems not to have

diminished in the 55 years since she first arrived in Mexico. Of some pale guavas: “These are a little over the hill. I want them greener.” Of the wild mushrooms called *clavitos* (little nails): “Unusual to see them this late in the year. Troubling.” Of a sack of chiles de árbol: “Imported from China! The flavor is not the same! And look, they’re 80 pesos to the kilo; the local ones are 120. How can the farmers be expected to compete?” At the table of a seller of wild greens, Kennedy’s eyes light up at the sight of *quelites* (lamb’s-quarter). “Señora, how do you cook it?” she asks. The vendor replies that she boils them in unsalted water, drains, and then salts them. It must be sheer reflex by now, this thing that Kennedy has spent a half-century doing: collecting recipes from cooks across the vast span of Mexico, a job that is never complete.

As we head out onto the road in Kennedy’s Nissan pickup truck, the parking attendant offers a blessing. Kennedy beams. “Always nice to get a blessing, isn’t it? Especially as I’m such a pagan!” Next stop is a *pulqueria*—a cantina specializing in the sale of *pulque*, the fermented sap of maguey. The owner, whom she introduces as Rigoberto Medrano Soto, fills small earthenware cups with frothing, milky white *pulque*—bracing, sour, vigorously effervescent. Kennedy and the *pulquero* discuss the health of his plants, and the work of a maguey researcher Kennedy recently brought back with her from a conference in Hidalgo. This is another vital aspect of her work: the collecting and cataloguing of information about edible plants in Mexico, a place of astonishing biodiversity.

In fact, the more time I spend with Diana Kennedy, the more I’m reminded not of Julia Child, but of the 19th-century philosopher-naturalists, of Charles Darwin, or Henry David Thoreau, an impression only reinforced by a tour of her adobe house. It’s beautiful but not at all grand, more like a thing that sprang from the rocky soil than a structure built by human hands, surrounded by evergreen forest and vegetable gardens heaving with produce. The man Kennedy describes as the foreman of the property, Carlos Ferrer, works closely with botanists from UNAM (the National Autonomous University of Mexico); when I arrive, he’s preparing a batch of plant samples. There is an agreeable, industrious sort of feeling all around.

In an outdoor kitchen equipped with wood-fired grills and two adobe beehive ovens, reflectors are set up to harness the sun’s energy and heat water; pinned to a clothesline nearby, plastic bags, rinsed for reuse, bob

on the breeze. Upstairs, Kennedy’s bedroom opens onto a sun-drenched study; books and papers are stacked on every surface (“My out-box,” she says, pointing to a chaise longue buried in mail), and dozens of morel mushrooms are laid out to dry. A door past the staircase leads to a greenhouse planted in specimens ranging from culantro to vanilla to bananas. A large tank collects rainwater throughout the year—it’s the house’s only source, and Kennedy monitors every drop—while a patch of land below the garden serves as a filter bed for waste water.

I think again of Thoreau, and his own experiment in living close to the land at Walden Pond: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Kennedy’s statement of purpose, laid out in her book *My Mexico* (Clarkson Potter, 1998), is slightly less grandiloquent but no less firm in its convictions: “I wanted a house of locally made materials that would address itself to the resources of the area and be in tune with the restrictions with which my neighbors had to live, and had survived, for many years.” And it must be said, while Thoreau lasted two years in the woods, Kennedy has persevered for 32, and counting.

I RETURN TO THE PULQUERIA ONE evening, and as the sun drops behind the mountains, Medrano Soto provides some perspective on what persevering in this part of Mexico has come to mean in recent years. The area has seen its share of the narco-crime currently oppressing the country. People are on edge, cautious about going out; whereas his father typically sold 500 liters of *pulque* daily back in the 1980s, today the *pulqueria* sells more like 30 liters in a day, most of it carry-out. Kennedy, he emphasizes, has set down deep roots in this place. “She’s very altruistic,” he says. “She cares about things a lot of Mexican people don’t.”

It’s a common refrain among Kennedy’s friends and colleagues, in Mexico and abroad. Carmen “Titita” Ramírez Degollado, the chef-matriarch who presides over the El Bajío restaurants in Mexico City, is one of many Mexican chefs who have made the pilgrimage to Kennedy’s kitchen to cook and learn. “Diana has dedicated her life to Mexican cooking!” she says. According to Fran McCullough, the editor at Harper & Row who worked with Kennedy to produce her seminal early books in the 1970s (see “A Life in Letters,” [page 60](#)), “Because she started her

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THESE ARE DISHES SHE'S MADE TOO MANY TIMES TO COUNT, BUT KENNEDY APPROACHES EACH ONE AS IF SHE'S MAKING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME

work when she did, and with an anthropologist's eye but a home cook's approach, she had a unique appreciation of the cooks who shared their food with her. She has both authority and an amateur's total surrender to her subject."

As for Kennedy, she's a stickler about giving credit where it's due. "Josefina Velázquez de León did it first, beginning in the 1940s," she says, "traveling to different regions, collecting recipes, and publishing them. She was the one who opened my eyes to Mexico's regional cuisines." As a writer, Kennedy's inspiration was fellow Englishwoman Elizabeth David, "though I'm not as scholarly—no, not nearly—as she."

Writing books wasn't even a faint ambition when Kennedy (née Diana Southwood) arrived in Mexico in 1957, with her soon-to-be husband, Paul Kennedy, a *New York Times* correspondent living in the capital. In a poignant passage from *Nothing Fancy* (Dial Press, 1984), her wonderful memoir-with-recipes, Kennedy draws a sketch of her husband with characteristic candor and economy. "He would collect recipes for me when I couldn't accompany him on his travels," she writes, and then shares one that he recorded for "Sancocho (Dominican National Dish)," hilarious in its telegraphic terseness. "His typing was no better than mine, his spelling far worse—like me, he was always in a hurry."

OVER SEVERAL AFTERNOONS IN Kennedy's kitchen—the indoor one, with a great tiled "peninsula" equipped with gas burners, its counters strewn with yet more labeled, dated specimens (chiles, herbs, pineapple vinegars)—I get more mental snapshots from that happy period in her life, in the 1950s and '60s, when every day brought thrilling new flavors and exotic ingredients. Preparing a snack of *salsa de albañil* (literally, "bricklayers' sauce"), a tangy tomatillo salsa with sliced avocado, strips of *queso fresco*, and chopped cilantro, Kennedy recalls the first time she tried it, at the Lincoln Grill in Mexico City in the early '60s. It was served to "soak up the drinks," along with tortillas.

In the late 1960s, when Kennedy was living in New York City following her husband's untimely death from cancer, it was her friend Craig Claiborne, the food editor of *The New York Times*, who pushed her to start teaching Mexican cooking classes. That's how McCullough, then

an editor at Harper & Row and a California transplant hungry for good Mexican food, found her, and ended up working on five books with her. By 1976 Kennedy was back in Mexico City; in 1980, she moved out here to Michoacán, to the property she dubbed Quinta Diana. Before long, the acolytes began arriving at her kitchen door.

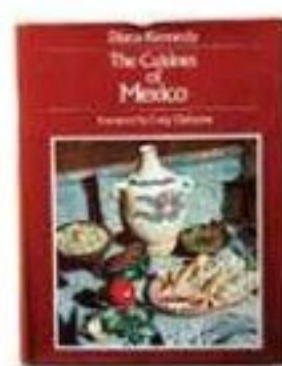
As we work, Kennedy's kitchen assistant, a young man named Miguel Angel, works alongside us; he and she cook in easy symbiosis, often taking over from one another mid-task. I'm assigned to slice an avocado, a duty of which I have, up to now, considered myself adequately capable. Kennedy takes one look and says, "Well, we won't be photographing that one." This qualifies as getting off easy. "I've seen her bring a very famous chef to tears by critiquing his efforts to make her food," McCullough tells me. But isn't learning the point? Here is a woman who went into the woods to live deliberately. If you don't want to do things her way, then why follow her into the woods?

What strikes me above all about the dishes we prepare in Kennedy's kitchen is how simple, but also deeply flavorful and satisfying, they are. A Oaxacan egg-and-masa "omelet" infused with the rich, round, root beer-like flavor of *yerba santa* leaf. Lusty Central Mexican-style "pot" beans topped with soft cheese melting to cream. "I just mash the beans slightly," she says, "so they'll absorb more flavor." *Requesón revuelto*, a ricotta scramble with serrano chiles, is cooked until the curds are golden and sweetened ever so slightly by tomatoes. These are dishes she's made too many times to count, the kind of thing she'll produce in minutes for lunch. But she approaches each one as if she's making it for the first time. After all these years, the ingredients still turn her on. Sautéing some *quintonil*, a green in the amaranth family, on a ceramic comal, she inhales deeply. "Smells of iron, doesn't it?" she murmurs. "And the chickens are going to love it, because they'll get all those stalks!"

Honest food. "*Comida casera*," she calls it, home cooking of the very best kind. The attention to detail and technique, to doing things properly, that she's observed in Mexican home cooks has earned her highest admiration. "To me, the interesting part of cooking is cooking," she says, "bringing flavors out of ingredients, not having to put flavors in." Fronting, in other words, only the essential facts of life. —Beth Kracklauer

A Life in Letters

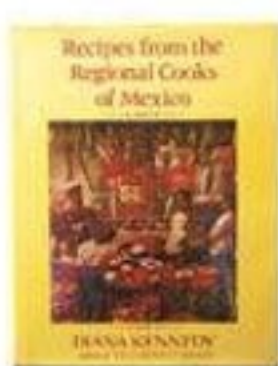
Diana Kennedy's body of work provides an incomparable education in Mexican regional cooking. Below, her output so far.



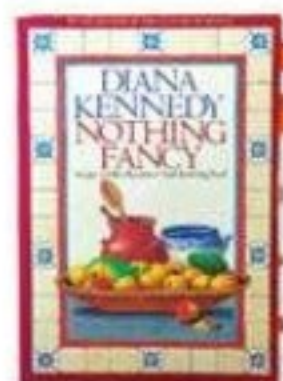
1972



1975



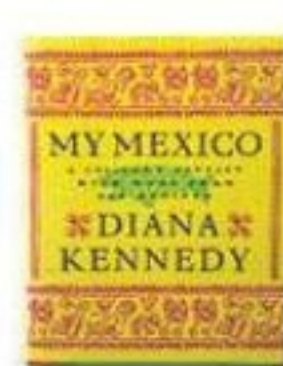
1978



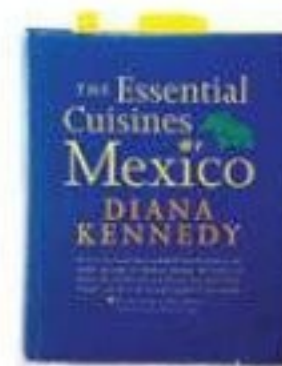
1984



1989



1998



2000



2003



2010



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INGREDIENTS

2 oz. Patrón Silver
Tonic water
Lime wedge for garnish

METHOD

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highball glass. Garnish with
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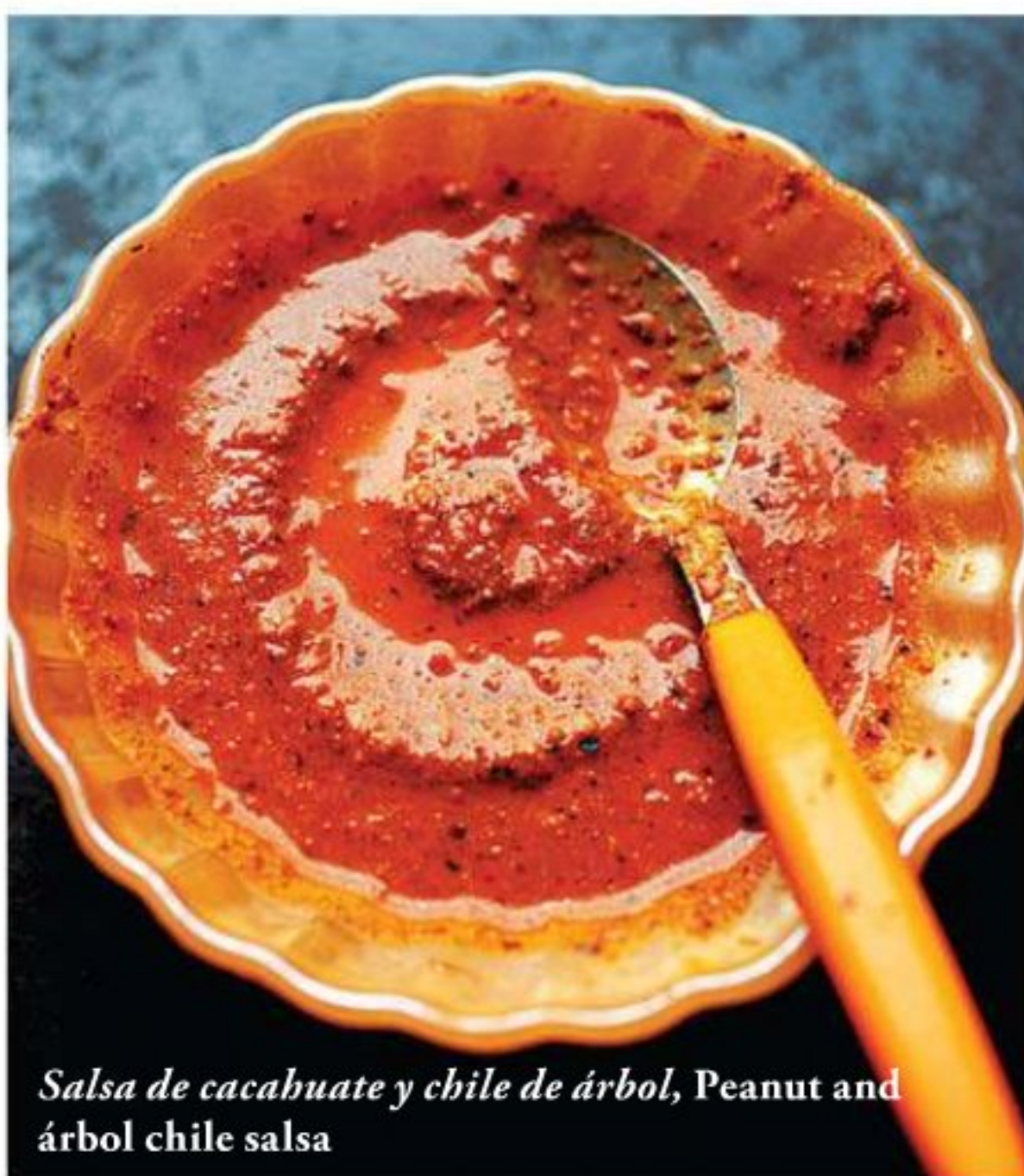
Sikil p'ak, pumpkin seed salsa



Salsa roja, tomato and chile salsa



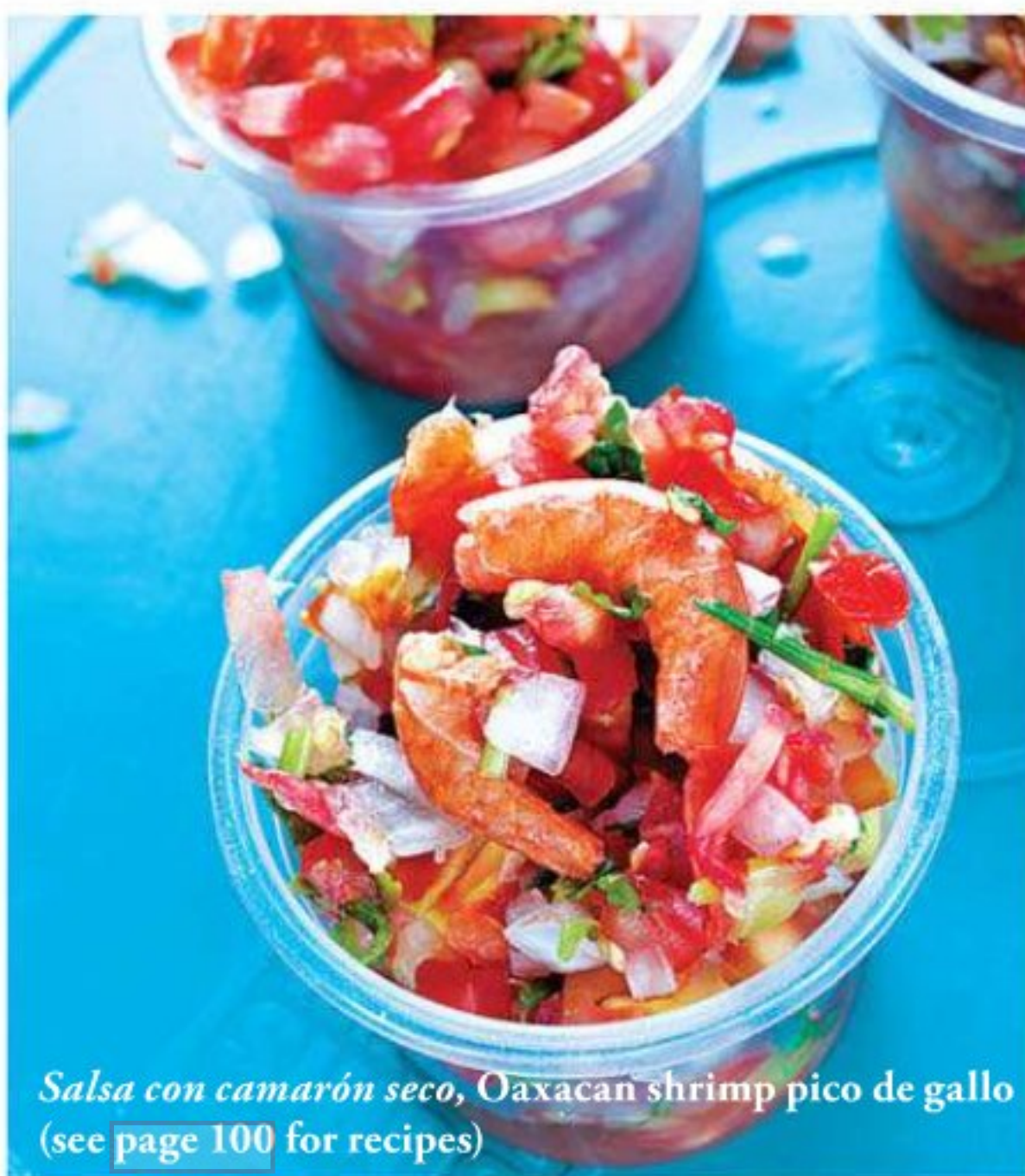
Salsa de piña, fresh pineapple salsa



Salsa de cacahuete y chile de árbol, Peanut and árbol chile salsa



Salsa verde, green tomatillo salsa



Salsa con camarón seco, Oaxacan shrimp pico de gallo (see page 100 for recipes)

SPECIAL SAUCE

In Mexico, salsa is an endless journey. Every microclimate, every state, has its own ingredients, its own methods of making it. If you counted all the salsas in Mexico, I assure you there would be thousands. Yet there's one thing most Mexicans would agree on: There's no meal without salsa. It's more than just a condiment for anointing tacos, drizzling into soups, and spooning onto eggs, grilled fish, and roast meats—salsa adds a sense of place to everything it touches. Growing up on the border of Puebla and Oaxaca, I would pick deep-red tomatillos and tiny *pequin* peppers; they both grew wild near my home. I'd char them on the *comal* and grind them in a *molcajete*, a mortar and pestle, along with onion and sea salt, to make the salsa that defined my childhood. So many salsas are improvised from the foods available locally. In coastal Oaxaca, the abundance of seafood has led to the creation of a *pico de gallo* salsa of tomatoes, onions, chiles, and cilantro that's studded with shrimp. *Sikil p'ak*, a Mayan specialty of the Yucatán, features pan-toasted pumpkin seeds, available in abundance throughout the region, as the base for a rich salsa that's as thick as a dip. And in the hot lowlands of Chiapas, peanuts, sesame seeds, guajillo chiles, and *chiles de árbol* are fried together and blended to make a lavish sauce. Other salsas, however, are so universally appealing that they've been adopted throughout Mexico, and beyond. *Salsa verde*, a refreshing blend of tomatillos, onion, jalapeños, garlic, and cilantro, and *salsa roja*, a potent jam of charred tomatoes and guajillo chiles, can be found at nearly every taqueria in Mexico City. But no matter the type, I enjoy salsa best the way that I believe it is intended to be eaten plain, on a fresh tortilla. —Hugo Ortega, chef-owner of Hugo's Restaurant, Houston, Texas, and author of *Street Food of Mexico* (Bright Sky Press, 2012)



Tomato-and-chile *salsa roja* adds color and spice to this *huarache con carne asada y nopales*, Mexico City-style corn tortilla with cactus, steak, and onions. See [page 95](#) for a recipe.

TROPICAL FRUITS AND DELECTABLE SNACKS

O'AHU



Cool, healthy refreshment and tasty snacks—nothing is more delicious than local island treats.

JUICE & SMOOTHIE STANDS

Fruit stands and juice bars have popped up all over the island, featuring just-picked, island-grown fruits in juices, smoothies, bowls, and power drinks that nourish and energize. Local yet exotic choices include pineapple, mango, papaya, banana, lychee, starfruit, guava, passion fruit, watermelon, strawberries, and cherimoya.

- * **Lanikai Juice** is one of the best for tree-ripened fruit smoothies with yogurt, soy milk or coconut milk, honey, and supplements. Their pure tropical fruit juices are a winner, too.
- * Island residents make a beeline for **Diamond Head Cove Health Bar's** açai bowl with pa'i'ai—thick, starchy taro root also known as poi. The bowls are topped with strawberries, blueberries, honey and bee pollen. Or, relax with a kava drink, made fresh and served in a coconut cup or blended into a smoothie.
- * **Blue Hawai'i Lifestyle** offers a twist on the açai bowl by topping theirs with Hawai'ian spirulina.
- * In Honolulu's vibrant Chinatown, the many fruit, coffee, and tea shops provide welcome refreshment on a warm day. Most, like **Café de Tim**, puree fresh tropical fruit and serve it with tapioca "bubbles" for textural fun.

KCC FARMERS' MARKET VENDORS

Look for these healthy refreshers at the Saturday morning market:

- * **PacifiKool's** island ginger ale, noteworthy for its pungent gingery flavor; the Super Kool ginger and mint drink gives you a boost with macha (powdered green tea) and spirulina.
- * **Otsuji Farms'** Hawaiian Fresh Green drink is made with the farm's just-harvested dinosaur kale, pineapple, and komatsuna (mustard spinach).
- * **Hawaiian Crown's** Sweet Gold pineapple juice is pure, simple, and sweet.
- * **OnoPops'** fresh fruit paletas, in creative combos like pickled green mango.

BAKERIES & MORE

When you've had your fruit fix and earned a sweet treat, look for these local snacks:

- * **Malasadas:** Eggy, rich Portuguese fried doughnuts coated with sugar; there are none better than at Leonard's Bakery.
- * **Mochi:** Japanese glutinous rice cakes. Sticky, soft discs filled with sweetened adzuki beans or maybe peanut butter, found throughout the island.
- * **Kūlolo:** Hawaiian baked "pudding" of grated taro and coconut milk. Sticky, gooey, and 'ono (delicious) when made by Hanalei Taro and Juice.
- * **Coco Puff:** Liliha Bakery's airy chocolate-filled cream puff, topped with Chantilly icing, an island favorite for over 50 years.

Where to Eat

JUICE & SMOOTHIE STANDS

LANIKAI JUICE

600 Kailua Rd. or 4346 Wai'alae Ave.
lanikaijuice.com

DIAMOND HEAD COVE HEALTH BAR

3045 Monsarrat Ave.
diamondheadcove.com

BLUE HAWAII LIFESTYLE

Ala Moana Center
bluehawaiiilifestyle.com

CAFÉ DE TIM

Maunakea Marketplace courtyard
1120 Maunakea St.

KAPI'OLANI COMMUNITY COLLEGE (KCC) FARMERS' MARKET

Saturday, 7:30 to 11 a.m.
4303 Diamond Head Road
hfbf.org

BAKERIES & MORE

LEONARD'S BAKERY

933 Kapahulu Ave.
98-042 Kamehameha Hwy., Aiea
leonardshawaii.com

HANALEI TARO AND JUICE

at the KCC Farmers' Market
hanaleitaro.com

LILIIHA BAKERY

515 N. Kuakini St.
liliihabakeryhawaii.com

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Casa Dragones Guacamole
with tortilla chips (see recipe
at right).



THE RECIPES

Mexico's vast and varied menu includes both regional specialties and dishes like guacamole and carne asada that have transcended geography to become widely loved classics. The recipes that follow were gathered on our travels to Mexico over the last year or shared by the Mexican chefs who were our trusted guides, including Iliana de la Vega, Hugo and Ruben Ortega, and Roberto Santibañez. Along with cooking tips, step-by-step instructions, and a glossary of essential ingredients and equipment, they are an excellent point of entry to the fundamental flavors and techniques of Mexican cooking.

Appetizers

Casa Dragones Guacamole

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

Angela Tovar Morales, a cook at La Casa Dragones in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, gave us the recipe for her classic guacamole (pictured at left) with fresh tortilla chips. For the best results, she suggests making it in a *molcajete*, or mortar and pestle (see [page 91](#)).

- 1/4 cup finely chopped white onion
- 2 tbsp. minced cilantro
- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 3 ripe avocados, halved, pitted, peeled, and cut into 1" chunks
- 1 plum tomato, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- Tortilla chips, for serving

1 In a large bowl or *molcajete*, combine onion, cilantro, chiles, and garlic; sprinkle heavily with salt, and mash with a fork or pestle into a chunky paste.

2 Add avocados, tomato, and lime juice, and stir to combine, mashing some of the avocado slightly as you stir. Season with salt, and serve with fresh tortilla chips.

Cóctel de Mariscos

(Seafood Cocktail)

SERVES 4

This zesty mix of fresh seafood, tomato and lime juices, and hot sauce (pictured on [page 26](#)) is a refreshing snack or light meal eaten along Mexico's coasts.

- 2 lb. medium cooked shrimp, peeled, deveined, tails removed
- 1/2 cup shucked raw clams
- 1 cup tomato juice
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 2 tbsp. minced red onion

- 1 1/2 tsp. Mexican hot sauce, such as Cholula
- 1 1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 canned chipotle chiles in adobo, plus 2 tbsp. adobo sauce from can
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced cilantro
- 1/2 avocado, halved, pitted, peeled, and thinly sliced
- Saltine crackers, for serving

1 Place 12 whole shrimp in a small bowl and reserve. Roughly chop remaining shrimp and place in a large bowl with clams. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. Meanwhile, combine tomato juice, oil, lime juice, onion, hot sauce, Worcestershire, garlic, chipotles with adobo sauce, and salt and pepper in a blender, and purée until smooth; refrigerate cocktail mix until chilled.

2 Divide seafood mixture among 4 chilled sundae glasses, and sprinkle with cilantro; pour cocktail mix over top. Place 3 reserved whole shrimp on the edge of each glass, and place avocado on top; serve immediately with crackers.

Tostadas de Camarón Seco

(Shrimp Tostadas)

SERVES 8

A mix of dried shrimp, eggs, and tangy achiote makes an intensely savory topping for fried tortillas in this simple dish (pictured on [page 26](#)), eaten as an appetizer or snack in coastal Oaxaca.

- 4 oz. Mexican dried shrimp (see [page 91](#))
- 1 tsp. achiote paste, such as El Yucateco (see [page 90](#))
- 3 jalapeños, stemmed
- 2 eggs
- 1 large white onion, roughly chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp. canola oil, plus more for frying
- 8 corn tortillas



Chipotles en Adobo “Canned chipotles en adobo bring complex, smoky sweetness to dishes like the jaibas enchipotladas [see recipe below]. Flavors vary widely between brands; my favorites are La Morena, San Marcos, and La Costeña. Once you’ve opened a can, save leftovers by puréeing them along with their flavorful sauce and storing them in a glass container in the refrigerator.” —Roberto Santibañez, chef-owner of Fonda restaurants in New York City

Roughly chopped cilantro leaves, for garnish

1 Combine shrimp, achiote paste, jalapeños, eggs, onion, and salt in a food processor, and purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add purée, and cook, stirring often, until mixture is reduced, thickened, and browned (it should look like cooked ground beef), about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set shrimp mixture aside.

2 Pour oil to a depth of 2” in a 6-qt. Dutch oven and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 360°. Working in batches, add tortillas, and fry, turning once, until crisp and golden brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain briefly, season, and then transfer to a serving platter. Divide shrimp mixture among tortillas, and sprinkle with cilantro before serving.

Chalupas Poblanas

(Thick Tortillas Fried with Salsa)

SERVES 12

These thick tortillas (pictured below, at left), bathed in two types of salsa and garnished with shredded chicken, are a popular street snack in Mexico.

- 1** cup masa harina (see [page 91](#))
- 1** tsp. canola oil
- 1** tsp. kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup salsa roja (see [page 102](#) for a recipe)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup salsa verde (see [page 102](#) for a recipe)
- 1** large white onion, finely chopped
- Finely shredded cooked chicken (optional), for serving
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lard (see [page 91](#)) or canola oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled queso fresco (see [page 91](#))

1 Make the tortillas: Combine

masa harina, oil, salt, and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 1 tbsp. warm water in a bowl, and stir until dough forms. Knead dough in bowl until very smooth but not sticky, about 3 minutes. Using your hands, pinch off pieces of dough and shape into about twelve $1\frac{1}{2}$ ” balls, each weighing about 1 oz. Heat a 12” cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, flatten each ball in a tortilla press (see [page 78](#)), and add to skillet; cook, turning once, until blackened in spots on both sides and cooked through, about 4 minutes. Transfer and divide tortillas between two baking sheets in a single layer and set aside.

2 Place salsa roja and 2 tbsp. water in a blender, and purée until very smooth, at least 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, clean out blender, and repeat with salsa verde and another $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water; transfer salsa verde to a separate bowl. Using a spoon, place about 1 tbsp. salsa roja on top of

half the tortillas, spreading it to the edges; repeat with salsa verde and remaining tortillas. Divide onion among all tortillas, and top with shredded chicken, if you like.

3 Return skillet to stove, add lard, and heat over high heat until it begins to smoke. Working in batches, add tortillas, salsa sides up, and cook, basting tops with some of the hot lard, until crisp at the edges, about 1 minute. Using a metal spatula, transfer tortillas to a serving platter, and sprinkle with queso fresco; serve immediately.

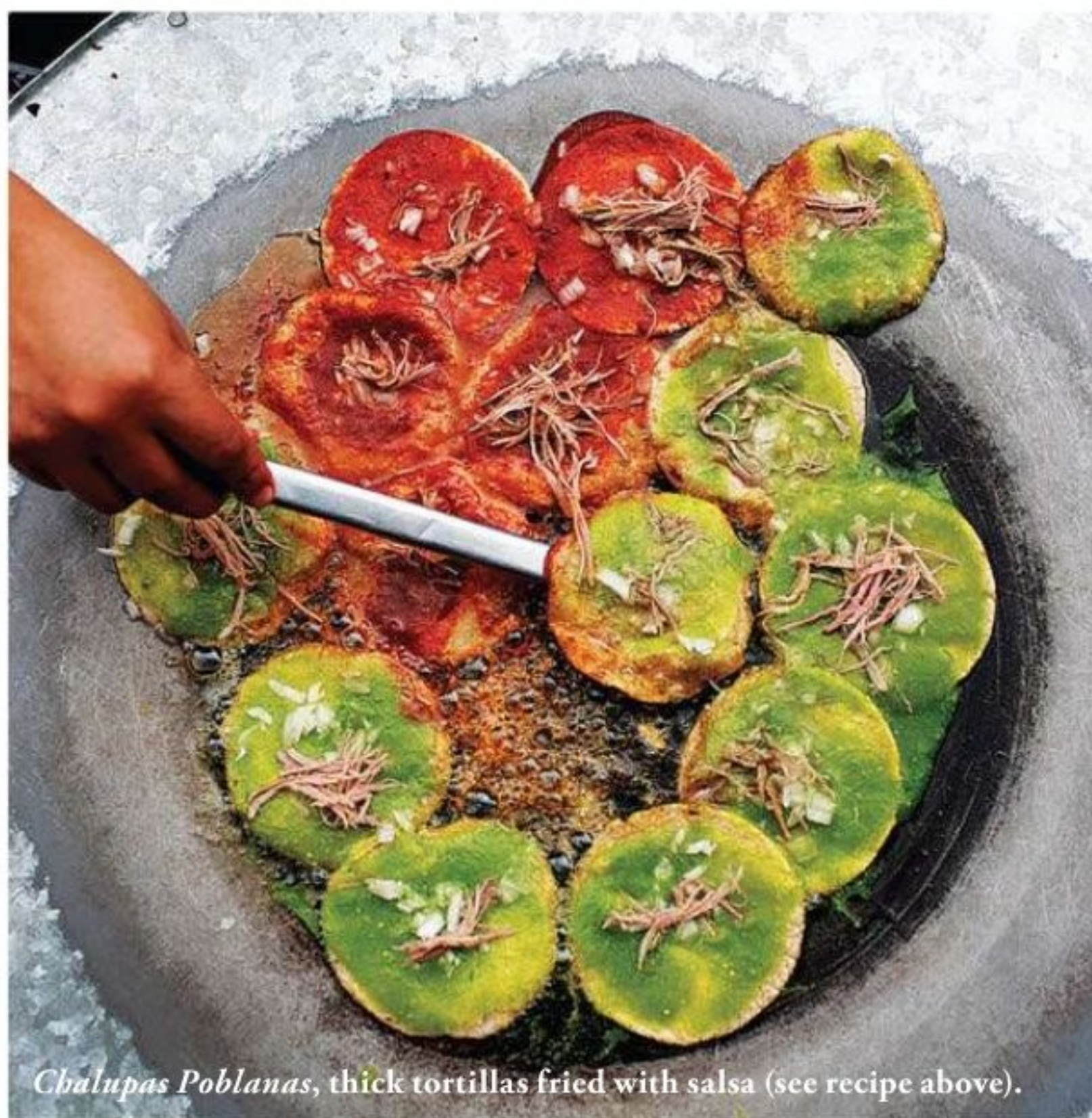
Jaibas Enchipotladas

(Pan-Fried Crabs in Chipotle Sauce)

SERVES 4–6

To simplify this recipe from Tabasco state for pan-fried crabs in a smoky chipotle sauce (pictured on [page 30](#)), ask your fishmonger to clean and cut the live crabs in half for you.

- 1** cup mayonnaise
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. Worcestershire sauce



Chalupas Poblanas, thick tortillas fried with salsa (see recipe above).



Enchiladas de Chile Ajo, Oaxacan red chile enchiladas (see [page 76](#) for a recipe).



Chocolate inside



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Selecting Tomatillos “When buying tomatillos to make dishes like the pork ribs in tomatillo sauce [pictured below; see [page 78](#) for a recipe], look for firm fruits with husks that cling tightly to the fruit. These contain the most juice and will not be mealy inside. And smaller ones will typically be more flavorful.” —Iliana de la Vega, chef-owner of El Naranjo in Austin, Texas, and chef-instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in San Antonio

- 3 canned chipotle chiles in adobo, plus 2 tbsp. adobo sauce from can
- 2 tbsp. minced garlic
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 6 blue crabs, cleaned and halved from head to tail
- 6 tbsp. canola oil
- Lime wedges, for serving

1 Combine mayonnaise, Worcestershire, and chiles with sauce in a food processor, and process until smooth. Transfer to a large bowl, and set aside. Combine garlic and salt on a cutting board and using your knife, mash and chop into a smooth paste; rub paste evenly over crab halves.

2 Heat 3 tbsp. oil in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Add half the crabs and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, red, and cooked through, about 8 minutes. Transfer to bowl with chipotle sauce, and repeat with remaining oil and crabs. Toss crabs with sauce until evenly coated, and serve immediately with lime wedges.

Caldo Xóchitl con Flor de Calabaza

(Squash Blossom Soup)

SERVES 6–8

Mexico’s soups are famous for their freshness and simplicity. This one (pictured on [page 52](#)) marries delicate squash blossoms with chiles, queso fresco, and shredded chicken in an enriched chicken broth.

- 8 cups chicken stock
- 8 bone-in, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 cups crumbled queso fresco (see [page 91](#))
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 8 chipotle chiles in adobo, finely chopped
- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- ½ medium white onion, minced
- 1 cup roughly torn squash blossoms (see [page 90](#))
- ½ cup minced cilantro leaves

1 Bring stock and chicken to a boil over medium-high heat; reduce heat to medium-low and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 25 minutes. Remove chicken and transfer to a bowl to cool; remove and discard bones, and finely shred chicken. Set chicken aside, and keep broth hot.

2 To serve, divide chicken, cheese, rice, both chiles, and onion among serving bowls; top with squash blossoms, and then ladle hot broth into bowls. Sprinkle with cilantro before serving.

Sopa de Chile Ancho

(Ancho Chile Soup with Avocado, Crema, and Chile Pasilla)

SERVES 6–8

The heat of this deep-red ancho chile soup (pictured on [page 52](#)) and its pasilla chile garnish is balanced by the addition of cooling crema and thinly sliced avocado.

- 3 dried ancho chiles (see [page 90](#))
- 4 medium plum tomatoes
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 small white onion
- ½ cup canola oil
- 8 small dried pasilla chiles (optional, for serving; see [page 90](#))
- 8 cups chicken stock
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup queso fresco (see [page 91](#)), crumbled
- 8 sprigs cilantro, finely chopped
- ½ cup crema (see [page 90](#)) or sour cream
- 1 avocado, very thinly sliced
- Fried tortilla strips, for garnish

1 Heat a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add ancho chiles, and cook, turning once, until lightly toasted, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, pour over 1 cup boiling water, and let sit until soft, about 30 minutes; drain



Costillas de puerco en salsa verde, pork ribs in tomatillo sauce (see [page 78](#) for a recipe).



Tacos de carne asada, grilled steak tacos (see [page 80](#) for a recipe).



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Cooking Tortillas “Many people heat store-bought tortillas by wrapping them in a wet towel and steaming them in a microwave, but this will leave them wet and flimsy, with an unpleasant taste. Instead, heat tortillas in a dry skillet over medium-high heat for about 45 seconds on each side, until they are slightly puffed, brown in spots, and very pliable, with a rich, toasty corn aroma.”

—Roberto Santibañez

chiles, reserving soaking liquid, and remove and discard stems and seeds. Transfer chiles to a blender and set aside. Return pot to heat, and add tomatoes, garlic, and onion; cook, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 10 minutes. Transfer to blender, and purée until smooth, at least 4 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into a bowl, and set chile purée aside.

2 Return saucepan to heat and add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil; add pasilla chiles, if using, and fry, turning once, until crisp, about 5 minutes. Transfer to paper towels and let cool. Discard oil and wipe pan clean.

3 Return pan to medium-high heat,

and add remaining oil. When hot, add chile purée, and fry, stirring constantly, until slightly reduced, about 6 minutes. Add stock, and bring to a boil; remove from heat, season with salt and pepper, and keep warm.

4 Divide cheese and cilantro among serving bowls, and then ladle soup over each. Top each with a dollop of crema, a few slices of avocado, and some tortilla strips; garnish with a fried pasilla chile, if you like.

Sopa de Frijol

(Black Bean Soup)

SERVES 8

This long-simmered soup (pictured on [page 52](#)) matches spiced black beans with a roasted tomato purée.

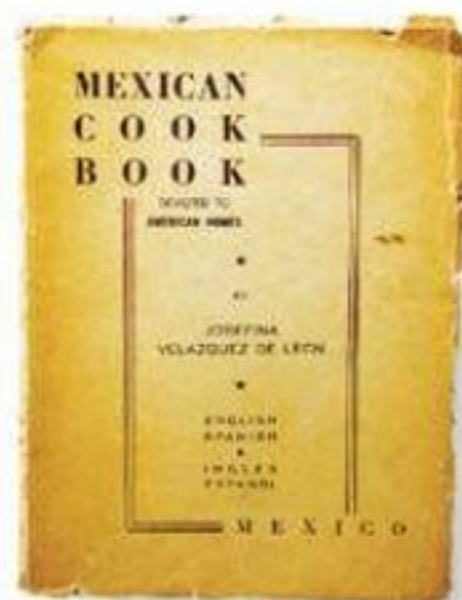
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup canola oil
- 8 oz. black beans, soaked overnight
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried oregano
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cumin
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 medium white onions, each cut in half
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored
- 4 cups chicken stock
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup crema (see [page 90](#)) or sour cream
- 8 oz. queso fresco (see [page 91](#)), cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ " cubes
- Fried tortilla strips, to garnish

1 Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil in a 4-qt. sauce-

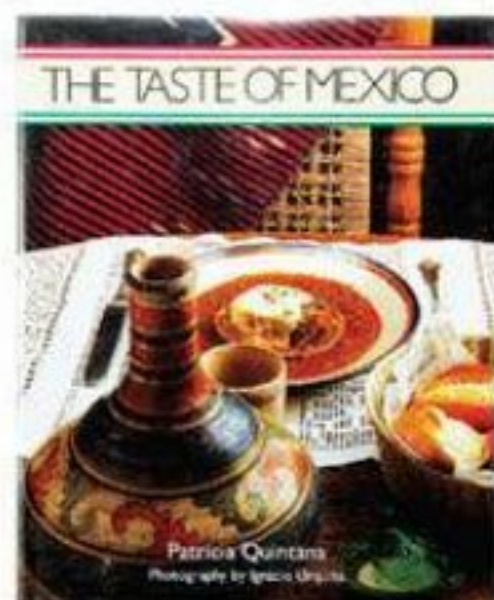
pan over medium-high heat. Add beans, oregano, cumin, 3 cloves garlic, 2 onion halves, and 5 cups water. Bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered and stirring occasionally, until beans are tender, about 2 hours. Remove from heat, and purée in a blender until smooth, at least 2 minutes; season with salt and pepper, and set beans aside.

2 Arrange an oven rack 4" from broiler, and heat broiler to high. Place remaining garlic and 1 onion half along with tomatoes on a foil-lined baking sheet; broil, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 8 minutes for garlic and tomatoes, about 16 minutes for onion.

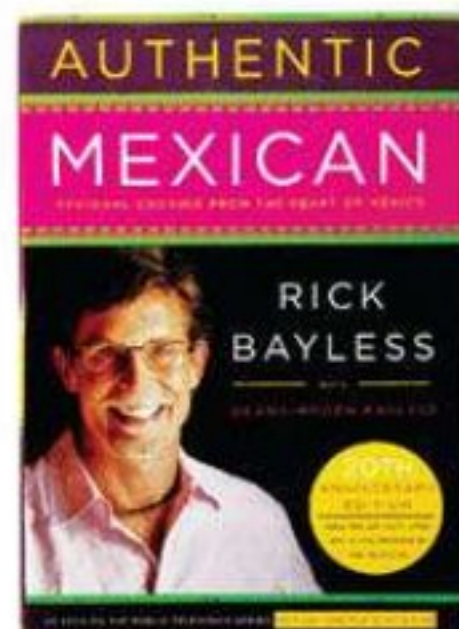
6 Essential Mexican Cookbooks



Mexican Cook Book Devoted to American Homes (Ediciones J. Velázquez de León, 1947) For historical research on Mexico's traditional cooking, we're indebted to author Josefin Velázquez de León (great aunt of *SAVEUR* writer Mauricio Velázquez de León; see “Queen of the Yucatán,” on [page 48](#)). Her first bilingual volume remains, 65 years after it was first published, an accessible guide to the Mexican kitchen.



The Taste of Mexico (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1986) For a straightforward guide to the fundamentals of regional Mexican cooking, we turn to Mexico City chef Patricia Quintana's well-curated overview of her country's cuisines. Its recipes for classic dishes—from the Yucatán's *papadzules* (tortillas in a toasted pumpkin-seed sauce) to stuffed shrimp from the Pacific coast of the northwest state of Sinaloa—are lucid and inviting.



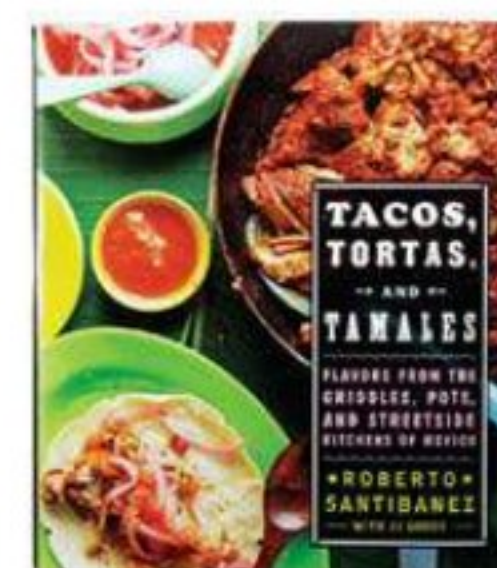
Authentic Mexican: Regional Cooking From the Heart of Mexico (William Morrow, 2007) In researching this issue, one book we turned to repeatedly was Rick Bayless's primer on Mexican cuisine (now in its 20th anniversary edition). We love the range of recipes, from slow-cooked stews to quick dishes like guacamole, and Bayless's cooking notes and glossaries of ingredients and equipment will be a boon to anyone new to Mexican cooking.



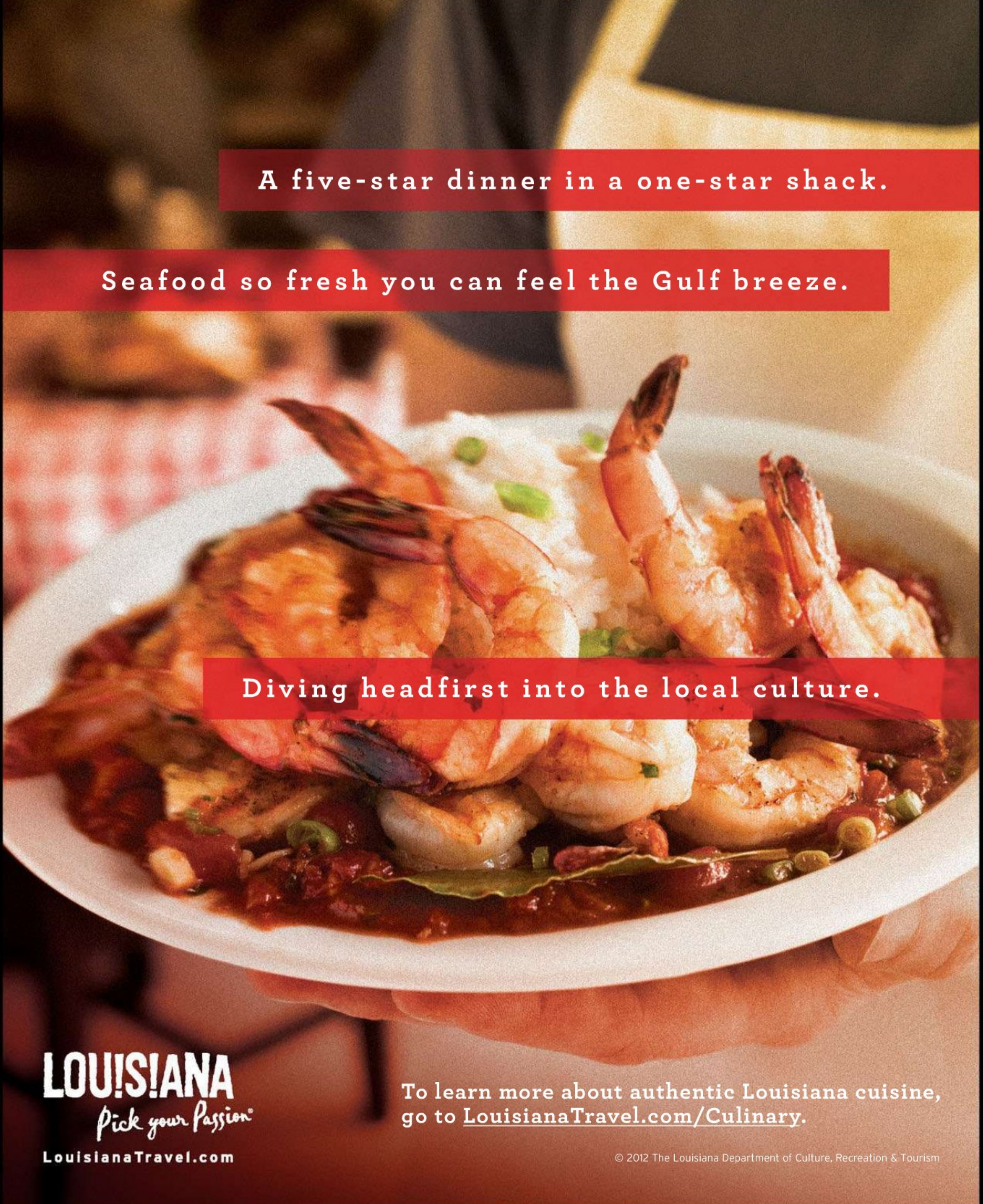
My Sweet Mexico (Ten Speed Press, 2012) Mexico is a dessert-lover's paradise, and Mexican pastry chef Fany Gerson's book is a fitting ode to all things *dulce*. Puebla's sweet potato confections; *tres leches* cake; frozen treats like *paletas* (ice pops); chile-dusted tamarrind bonbons—the diversity of sweets is fantastic. After cooking from its chapter devoted to *maíz* desserts, we'll never look at an ear of corn in the same way again.



Street Food of Mexico (Bright Sky Press, 2012) Growing up in Puebla, Hugo Ortega helped his family hawk *dulce de leche*. This book, the chef's homage to the street vendors of Mexico, provides a deep understanding of the techniques employed by these cooks to make magic from just a few ingredients. Its 100 recipes, gathered from streetside cooks across the country, are accompanied by lush location photography and essential cooking tips.



Tacos, Tortas, and Tamales (Wiley, 2012) Roberto Santibañez's new book is chock-full of recipes for the handheld meals we love: tacos with chorizo, chicken in adobo, and all kinds of other fillings; tortas stuffed with salt cod or chicken in green mole; goat cheese, jalapeño, and herb tamales. There are recipes, too, for home-cooked classics like *tamal de cazuela*, a masa and mushroom casserole, in this celebration of Mexico's everyday foods. —Karen Shimizu



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Transfer to a food processor, and purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes; pour through a fine strainer into a bowl, and set tomato purée aside.

3 Heat remaining oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Finely chop remaining onion half, add to pan, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add tomato purée, and cook, stirring constantly, until slightly reduced, about 3 minutes. Add beans and stock, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly reduced, about 45 minutes. Purée soup in blender until very smooth, at least 2 minutes; stir in crema, and season with salt and pepper. To serve, divide soup among serving bowls, and sprinkle with cheese and tortilla strips.

Sopa Fría de Aguacate

(Chilled Avocado Soup)

SERVES 6-8

Brightened with chiles and lime juice, this silky avocado soup (pictured on [page 52](#)) gets an added dose of richness from heavy cream.

- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 large ripe avocados, pitted, peeled, and roughly chopped
- 1 medium white onion, finely chopped
- 6 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/3 cup fresh lime juice
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored, seeded, and finely chopped

1 Combine half the serrano chiles, the avocados, and half the onion in a food processor, and process until a smooth paste forms. Add stock, cream, and lime juice, and purée until very smooth. Pour through a fine strainer into a bowl or pitcher, and season with salt and pepper; cover and refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours.

2 To serve, divide soup among serving bowls and top with a spoonful each of remaining chiles and onion, along with the tomatoes.

Sopa de Fideo

(Mexican Noodle Soup)

SERVES 6-8

The thin vermicelli-like noodles called *fideos* add starch and body to this elemental tomato soup (pictured on [page 52](#)) from Patricia Quintana, chef-owner of Izote restaurant in Mexico City.

- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3 ribs celery, finely chopped
- 3 medium carrots, finely chopped
- 1 medium white onion, finely chopped
- 6 cups chicken stock
- 1 28-oz. can whole, peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed by hand
- 2 oz. fideos (see [page 90](#)) or vermicelli noodles, broken into 2" pieces
- 8 oz. queso fresco (see [page 91](#)), crumbled
- 1/4 cup very thinly shredded parsley leaves

1 Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic, celery, carrots, and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add stock and tomatoes, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until tomatoes break down and are smooth, about 1 hour. Pour through a fine strainer into a bowl, and then pour soup back into pot; return pot to heat.

2 Add noodles to soup and cook, stirring, until al dente, about 4 minutes. To serve, divide cheese among serving bowls, and ladle soup over top; garnish with parsley.

Sopa de Poro y Papa

(Potato and Leek Soup)

SERVES 8-10

This creamy, rich soup is a favorite in Mexico City. In summer it's usually chilled, like a vichyssoise, but it's also served hot, especially in the cooler months.

- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 3 medium leeks, white and light green parts only, roughly chopped
- 2 medium white onions, roughly chopped
- 1 medium russet potato, peeled and roughly chopped
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 1 dried bay leaf
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup crema (see [page 90](#)) or sour cream
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped chives
- Olive oil, for garnish

1 Heat butter in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add leeks, onions, and potato, and cook, stirring often, until soft, about 20 minutes. Add stock and bay leaf, and cook, stirring occasionally, until potato is very tender, about 35 minutes. Transfer to a blender and purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes; season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a pitcher or bowl and refrigerate until chilled, about 2 hours.

2 To serve, divide chilled soup among serving bowls and dollop with a spoonful of crema, sprinkle with some of the chives, and drizzle with a couple drops of olive oil.

Requesón Revuelto

(Ricotta Scramble with Tomatoes)

MAKES ABOUT 2 1/2 CUPS

This scramble of fresh ricotta (pictured on [page 57](#)), flavored with chiles, onions, and tomatoes, is delicious wrapped in warm tortillas or piled on toasted bread.

- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped

Tortilla Buying Guide

Nothing can beat the supple texture and earthy flavor of freshly pressed tortillas. Still, there are some commercial brands that are quite good, though you must always cook them before serving (see "Cooking Tortillas," on [page 72](#)). Read the package: The chief ingredients should be corn, water, and slaked lime (sometimes listed as "corn treated with lime" or "trace of lime"). That last item is another name for calcium hydroxide, which is dissolved in a solution used to soak the corn before grinding—this makes the corn more digestible and improves the flavor and texture of the tortilla—a process called nixtamalization. Superior packaged tortillas are available in the United States in Mexican grocery stores and in many supermarkets; they can also be obtained by mail order. Below, a few brands we like. —Kellie Evans

1 Nuevo León Yellow Corn Tortillas (219/853-1900; [tortillasnuevoleon.com](#)) Yellow corn gives these a hint of sweetness and color.

2 Guerrero Tortillas de Maíz Blanco (972/232-5000; [tortillas-guerrero.com](#)) Classic white corn tortillas, both supple and sturdy.

3 Maria and Ricardo's Traditional Size Corn Tortillas (781/828-0848; [mariaandricardos.com](#)) Fluffy and earthy, with a popcorn-like flavor.

4 Maizteca Tortillas (718/641-3933; [maizteca.com](#)) A unique fresh-corn-on-the-cob taste.

5 La Jaliencia Corn Tortillas (313/237-0008; [tortillamundo.com](#)) Chewy and versatile, with a mild flavor.

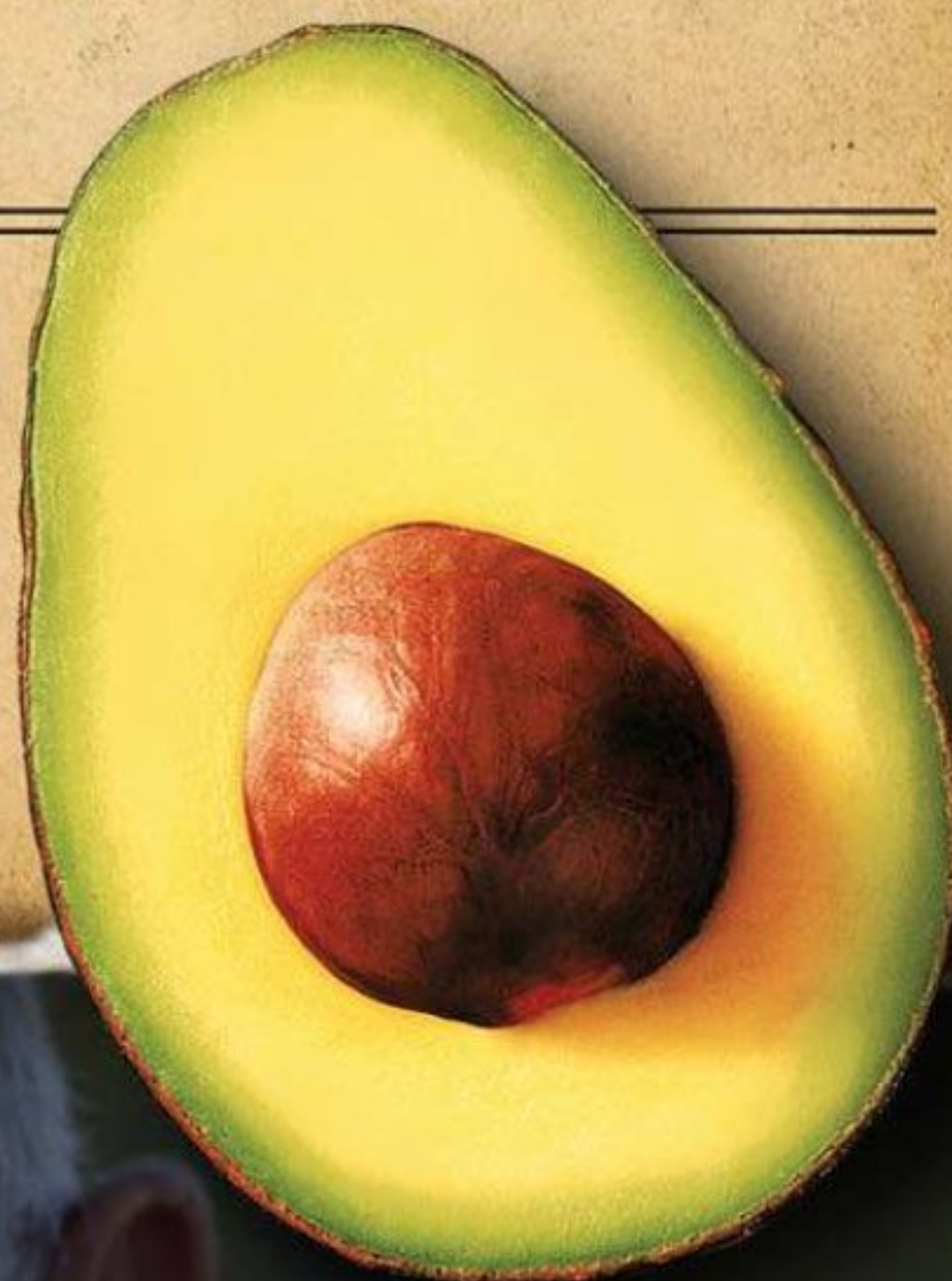


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- 1 small white onion, finely chopped
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored and finely chopped
- 2½ cups ricotta cheese
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Warm tortillas, for serving

Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add chiles and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 4 minutes. Add tomatoes, and cook, stirring, until almost dry, about 6 minutes. Add ricotta, and cook, stirring often, until mixture begins to turn light brown and ricotta is very smooth and thickened, about 20 minutes. Remove from heat and season with salt; serve immediately with tortillas.

Main Dishes

Enchiladas de Chile Ajo

(Oaxacan Red Chile Enchiladas)

SERVES 6-8

These classic Oaxacan-style enchiladas (pictured on [page 68](#)), stuffed with chicken and doused in a sweet chile-and-garlic sauce, come from Iliana de la Vega, chef-owner of El Naranjo in Austin, Texas.

- 3 oz. dried guajillo chiles
- 8 cloves garlic, peeled
- 6 plum tomatoes, cored
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed
- ½ large white onion, cut into ½" slices, plus 1 medium white onion, minced
- 1 cup plus 1 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ stale bolillo (see [page 98](#)) or 1 slice white sandwich bread, toasted and crumbled
- ¼ cup finely chopped piloncillo (see [page 91](#)) or packed light brown sugar
- 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 18 6" corn tortillas

- 1½ cups shredded cooked chicken
- ¾ cup crumbled Cotija (see [page 90](#)), plus more to garnish
- Sliced white onion rings and cilantro leaves, to garnish

1 Heat a 12" skillet over high heat, and add chiles. Cook, turning once, until lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and cover with 3 cups boiling water; let sit until soft, about 20 minutes. Drain chiles, reserving soaking liquid, and remove stems and seeds. Transfer chiles to a blender along with 1½ cups soaking liquid; purée until smooth, and set chile purée aside.

2 Return skillet to high heat, and add garlic, tomatoes, chiles, and large onion slices. Cook, turning as needed, until vegetables are lightly charred all over, about 8 minutes for the garlic, 14 minutes for the tomatoes, chiles, and onion slices. Transfer vegetables to a bowl, and let cool. Return skillet to high heat, and add 1 tbsp. oil; add chile purée, and fry, stirring constantly, until thickened to a paste, about 12 minutes. Return paste to blender along with vegetables, stock, oregano, thyme, pepper, and bread; purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into skillet, and return skillet to medium-high heat; bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until slightly reduced, about 6 minutes. Stir in sugar and juice, season with salt, and keep enchilada sauce warm in skillet.

3 Heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, grasp tortillas with tongs and fry in oil until pliable, about 1 minute. Transfer tortillas to skillet with enchilada sauce, and toss to coat in sauce, then place on a work surface. Divide chicken, cheese, and minced onion among tortillas, and roll each tortilla around chicken to form tight rolls. To serve, transfer enchiladas to a large serving plat-

ter, and sprinkle with more cheese, onion rings, and cilantro.

Pollo en Escabeche Oriental

(Yucatán-Style Chicken and Onion Stew)

SERVES 8

Delicately spiced, tangy *escabeche*, a preparation typical of the Yucatán, makes a vibrant marinade and sauce for stewed chicken (pictured at right). The three citrus fruits called for in this recipe approximate the flavor of the Yucatán's sour oranges, which are difficult to get here.

- 1 tbsp. ground coriander
- 1 tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tbsp. ground black pepper
- 1½ tsp. ground cumin
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- ¼ tsp. ground allspice
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon, preferably canela (see [page 90](#))
- 1 cup fresh orange juice
- 1 cup fresh grapefruit juice
- ¾ cup fresh lime juice
- 4 cloves garlic, minced, plus 20 whole cloves, peeled
- 2 3-4-lb. chickens, each cut into 8 pieces
- 4 Anaheim chiles, stemmed
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 5 medium white onions, halved and cut into ½"-thick slices
- 2 cups chicken stock
- Warm tortillas, for serving

1 In a small bowl, combine coriander, oregano, salt, pepper, cumin, cloves, allspice, and cinnamon; set spice mix aside. In a large bowl, whisk together half the spice mix, orange, grapefruit, and lime juices, and minced garlic; add chicken pieces, and toss to coat evenly in marinade. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

2 Meanwhile, heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat. Place whole cloves garlic and chiles on pan, and cook, turning as needed, until lightly charred all over, about 10 minutes for garlic, about 25 min-

utes for chiles. Transfer to a bowl, and set aside to cool. Remove chicken from marinade, reserving marinade, and working in batches, add to grill; cook, turning once, until lightly charred on both sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside.

3 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add onions, sprinkle with remaining spice mix, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and starting to brown, about 15 minutes. Stir in charred chiles and garlic, and then return chicken to pan along with reserved marinade and stock; bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 20 minutes. Uncover, and continue cooking until liquid is slightly reduced, about 15 minutes; serve with tortillas.

Sopa Seca

(Mexican Noodle Casserole)

SERVES 4

This recipe from cookbook author Diana Kennedy is a comforting casserole dense with thin *fideo* noodles bathed in chile sauce (pictured on [page 57](#)). Serve it with a salad or pickled chiles on the side.

- ¼ cup canola oil, plus more for greasing
- 8 oz. fideos (see [page 90](#)) or vermicelli noodles, broken into 3" pieces
- 4 canned chipotle chiles in adobo, minced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 15-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- ½ small white onion, roughly chopped
- ½ cup chicken stock
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup crumbled Cotija (see [page 90](#))
- ¾ cup crema (see [page 90](#)) or sour cream
- 2 tbsp. minced cilantro

1 Heat oven to 350°. Grease an 8" x 8" baking dish with oil; set



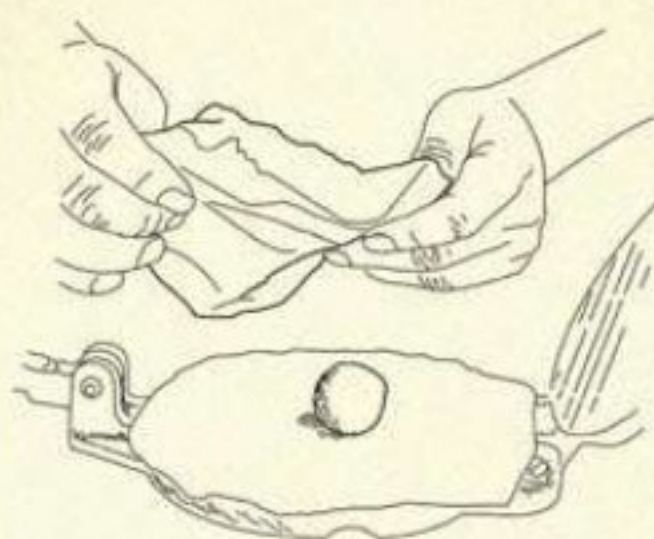
Pollo en escabeche oriental, Yucatán-style chicken and onion stew (see a recipe at left).

Fresh Tortillas

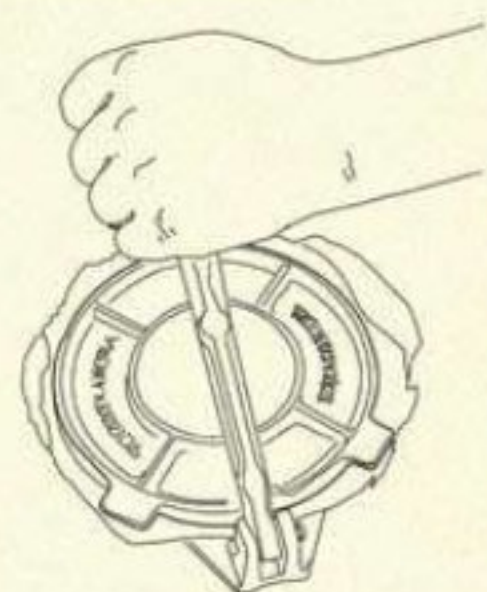
Making supple homemade tortillas is easy. Here's how it's done:



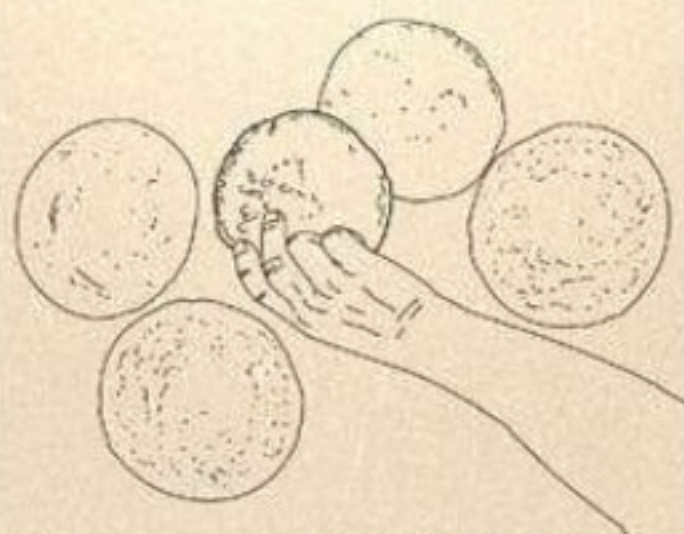
1 Place 1 cup masa harina in a bowl and make a well in center. Add $\frac{2}{3}$ cup plus 1 tbsp. water to well, and stir with your fingers to form a dough. Knead the dough until soft like Play-Doh.



2 Cut two 7" circles out of a clean shopping bag. Put 1 circle on the bottom plate of a tortilla press. Pinch off a golf ball-size piece of dough, roll it into a ball, and place it in the center; top with second circle.



3 Cover with top plate of tortilla press (see page 91), and press handle down to flatten dough. Open press; peel away plastic from tortilla. Immediately, place tortilla in a cast-iron skillet over medium heat.



4 Cook until it begins to brown and blister on bottom. Flip tortilla; cook until lightly toasted on other side. Transfer to a towel-lined bowl; cover to keep warm. Repeat to make more tortillas.

Frying Churros *"If the oil is not hot enough when frying churros [see page 103 for a recipe], the results will be soggy and pale. To get churros with a moist center and a crisp, caramelized exterior, heat the oil to 400 degrees. Do not crowd too many into the pot at once, as it will lower the heat. And be sure to wait long enough between batches for the oil to come back up to temperature."* —Ruben Ortega, executive pastry chef of Hugo's in Houston, Texas



aside. Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in two batches, add pasta and cook, stirring, until lightly browned and toasted, about 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain; set aside.

2 Purée chipotles, garlic, tomatoes, and onion in a blender until very smooth, at least 2 minutes. Return skillet to heat, and add tomato purée; cook, stirring constantly, until almost all liquid is evaporated, about 18 minutes. Add stock, and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add noodles, stir to combine, and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to baking dish, and cover with foil; bake until pasta is tender and sauce is absorbed, about 10 minutes.

3 Divide among serving plates, sprinkle with Cotija, and drizzle with crema; sprinkle with minced cilantro before serving.

Huevos a la Mexicana

(Mexican-Style Scrambled Eggs)

SERVES 4–6

This quick breakfast dish is made *a la Mexicana* with red tomatoes, white onion, and green jalapeño, ingredients that mirror the colors of the Mexican flag.

- 3 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 small white onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 1 plum tomato, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. thinly sliced cilantro leaves
- 8 eggs, lightly beaten

1 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, jalapeño, and tomato, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 6 minutes.

2 Add cilantro and eggs, and cook,

folding eggs over in large curds occasionally, until cooked through, about 4 minutes.

Costillas de Puerco en Salsa Verde

(Pork Ribs in Tomatillo Sauce)

SERVES 6–8

A spicy, fruity tomatillo sauce offsets the richness of bone-in pork ribs in this luscious dish (pictured on page 70) from the state of Puebla.

- 4 oz. tomatillos (see page 90), husked and rinsed
- 2 jalapeños, stemmed
- 2 cups lightly packed cilantro leaves
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 4 whole cloves garlic, peeled, plus 6 cloves, roughly chopped
- 2 lb. baby back pork ribs, cut into individual ribs
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 large white onion, cut lengthwise into 8 wedges

- 1 medium zucchini, cut into 2" x $\frac{1}{2}$ " batons
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Warm tortillas, for serving

1 Place tomatillos and jalapeños in a 4-qt. saucepan, and cover with water by 1". Bring to a boil over high heat; cook until slightly soft, about 5 minutes. Drain vegetables, and set aside to cool to room temperature. Place in a food processor along with cilantro, sugar, and whole garlic, and pulse until finely chopped but not puréed; set sauce aside.

2 Bring pork and 4 cups water to a boil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until all water evaporates, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Continue cooking pork, stirring often, until it begins to caramelize on the outside, about 10 minutes. Add chopped garlic, oregano, and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft and lightly browned, about 10



Chiles rellenos con picadillo, poblano chiles stuffed with spiced ground beef (see page 89 for a recipe)



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5 Mexican Cooking Schools

Seasons of My Heart

(Oaxaca; 521/951/508-0469; seasonsofmyheart.com) Visitors explore local markets, prepare regional dishes, make cheese, and bake bread pudding, among many other activities, under the tutelage of Susana Trilling (pictured above, left), a Mexican-American chef and cookbook author who has made her home in Oaxaca for decades.

Mexico Soul and Essence

(Mexico City; 52/555/564-8457; mexicosoulandessence.com) Panama-born chef and writer Ruth Alegria hosts classes in her Mexico City kitchen, including a chile identification session and workshops on seasonal dishes. For September: *chiles en nogada*, pica-

dillo-stuffed poblanos dressed in walnut sauce and pomegranate seeds.

Marilau Mexican Ancestry Cooking School

(San Miguel de Allende; 52/415/152-4376; traditionalmexicancooking.com.mx) Marilau Ricaud (above, center) comes from a long line of professional cooks and bakers and is an expert not only in the regional specialties of her home state of Guanajuato, but in the cooking of Oaxaca, Puebla, and other parts of Mexico, as well. Renowned for her tamales in particular, she offers classes ranging from salsa making to a two-week intensive on Mexican stews.

Mesón Sacristía

(Puebla; 800/712-4028; mesones-sacris

tia.com) Guests of this charming boutique hotel play apprentice to chef Alonso Hernández (above, right) in workshops on Pueblan classics like *mole poblano*, supplemented by trips to markets, museums, and historic sites.

Zirita Culinary Experiences

(Morelia; 521/443/275-4536; zirita.com.mx) Restaurateur Cynthia Martinez has created a shrine to the cuisine of small-town Michoacán. In outdoor kitchens over woodburning stoves, visitors learn to grind corn on a *metate*, press tortillas, and cook them on a *comal* guided by practiced home cooks. — Anna Stockwell and Elyse Inamine

minutes. Add sauce, and fry, stirring constantly, until slightly reduced, about 5 minutes. Add 4 cups water, bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to medium-low; cook, stirring occasionally, until pork is tender and sauce is thickened, about 30 minutes. Add zucchini, and cook until warmed through, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

3 Divide pork and sauce among serving bowls and garnish with a drizzling of salsa, if you like. Serve with tortillas.

Tacos de Carne Asada

(Grilled Steak Tacos)

SERVES 4-6

Skirt steak, a flavorful, juicy cut, is an excellent choice for *carne asada* (pictured on [page 70](#)), from Mexico's El Bajío region. This one is marinated with lime and spices before grilling.

- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 3 tbsp. canola oil

- 6 canned chipotles in adobo, roughly chopped
- 1 large white onion, sliced crosswise into $\frac{3}{4}$ "-thick rings, plus 1 small white onion, roughly chopped
- Juice of 2 limes, plus lime wedges for serving
- 1½ lb. trimmed skirt steak, cut crosswise into 4 steaks
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed
- Warm tortillas, for serving
- Salsa verde (see [page 102](#) for a recipe)

1 Heat an 8" skillet over high heat; add garlic, and cook, turning as needed, until charred all over, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a blender along with oil, chipotles, small chopped onion, and juice, and purée until smooth. Transfer to a 9" x 13" baking dish, and add steaks, tossing to coat in marinade; season generously with salt and pepper. Cover

with plastic wrap and let marinate at room temperature for 1 hour or in the refrigerator for up to 4 hours.

2 Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium hot. (Alternatively, heat a grill pan over medium-high heat.) Brush marinade from steaks and transfer to the grill; cook, flipping once, until charred and cooked to desired doneness, about 8 minutes for medium. Transfer steaks to a cutting board, and let rest for 5 minutes.

3 Meanwhile, place remaining onion and jalapeño on grill, and cook, turning as needed, until charred and softened, about 10 minutes. Transfer vegetables to a cutting board and finely chop; transfer to a serving bowl. Finely chop steaks and toss with grilled vegetables in bowl. Serve with tortillas, lime wedges and salsa verde on the side.

Pollo al Horno

(Chile-Spiced Grilled Chicken)

SERVES 6-8

Stained deep orange with achiote paste, this spice-slathered grilled chicken (pictured on [page 26](#)) pairs well with fresh, bracing *salsa verde*, which cuts through the dish's garlicky richness.

- 2 tbsp. prepared yellow mustard
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tbsp. achiote paste, such as El Yucateco (see [page 90](#))
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled
- 5 dried guajillo chiles (see [page 91](#)), stemmed and seeded
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 3-4-lb. whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- Salsa verde (see [page 102](#) for a recipe)

1 Combine mustard, salt, achiote paste, garlic, chiles, juice, and 1 cup boiling water in a blender, and purée until very smooth, at least 1 minute. Transfer to large bowl, and add

chicken; toss to coat, and then cover and let marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or overnight.

2 Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium. (Alternatively, heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium heat.) Remove chicken from marinade, and working in batches, add chicken to grill, and cook, turning once, until charred in spots and cooked through, about 30 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter, and serve with salsa verde on the side.

Guisado de Pollo

(Chicken and Potato Stew)

SERVES 6-8

Hearty and filling, this easy chicken stew (pictured on [page 26](#)) gets its signature smoky flavor from chipotles in adobo. It can also be made with any shredded, leftover meat, including pork or beef.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup canola oil
- 1½ lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 small white onion, chopped
- 1 medium carrot, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 1 cup finely chopped fresh or canned pineapple
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 canned chipotles in adobo sauce, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, quartered lengthwise
- 1 lb. Yukon gold potatoes, peeled, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 3 sprigs epazote (see [page 90](#)) or cilantro
- 1 15-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- 3 tbsp. capers, rinsed
- Juice of 1 lime

1 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season chicken

ANYWHERE ELSE THIS WOULD BE A REAL HIGH POINT.

But this is the Dead Sea, at over 1300 feet below sea level the lowest place on earth. First-time Israel vacationers Caitlin and Arthur are having the time of their lives – they are literally standing on pillars of salt. “We’d always heard about its beauty and healing qualities,” said Caitlin. “It was mesmerizing to float on the water and not sink.” Getting there was also a revelation: just 90 minutes from Jerusalem, and an easy visit to the place the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, as well as the mountaintop fortress of Masada. The Dead Sea. One of the wonders of the world. Only in Israel.



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Charring Fresh Ingredients *"The reason we char tomatoes, fresh chiles, onions, and garlic before adding them to a dish like the enchiladas de chile ajo [see page 76 for a recipe] is to concentrate the flavor, especially when they are underripe. It also adds a subtle smoky depth to the overall flavor of the dish. I cook them on a comal or skillet over medium-high heat, or under a broiler, until the skins are blackened and, in the case of tomatoes, the flesh is soft."* —Hugo Ortega, chef-owner of Hugo's in Houston, Texas



Papas con rajas, sautéed potatoes and chiles (see page 98 for a recipe).



Pollo en pipián verde, chicken with pumpkin seed-tomatillo sauce (see a recipe at right).

with salt and pepper, and working in batches, add to pan, and cook, turning once, until browned on both sides and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a plate and let cool; using a fork, finely shred meat and set aside.

2 Return saucepan to heat, and add onion, carrot, and peppers; cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add pineapple, cumin, thyme, garlic, chipotles, and jalapeño, and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add reserved shredded chicken back to pan along with potatoes, stock, epazote, and tomatoes, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender, about 30 minutes. Add capers and juice, and season with salt and pepper before serving.

Pollo en Pipián Verde

(Chicken with Pumpkin Seed-Tomatillo Sauce)

SERVES 8

Chef Iliana de la Vega of El Naranjo restaurant in Austin, Texas, shared her recipe for this classic Pueblan sauce made with pumpkin seeds and tomatillos (pictured at left).

- 1 3–4-lb. whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1½ medium white onions, cut into quarters
- 1 lb. tomatillos (see page 90), husks removed, rinsed
- 1 cup roughly chopped cilantro
- 4 large leaves romaine lettuce, roughly chopped
- 1½ cups raw, unhulled pumpkin seeds (see page 90)
- ½ cup roasted unsalted peanuts
- ¼ cup sesame seeds
- ¼ cup canola oil

1 Bring chicken and 8 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until cooked through,

about 45 minutes. Drain, reserving 5 cups cooking liquid, and keep warm.

2 Heat a 12" skillet over high heat. Add chiles, garlic, and onions, and cook, turning as needed, until all vegetables are charred all over, about 15 minutes. Transfer vegetables to a blender and set aside. Place tomatillos in a 4-qt. saucepan, and cover with water; bring to a boil, and cook until just tender, about 5 minutes. Drain, and transfer to blender along with cilantro and lettuce, and process all vegetables until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour purée through a fine strainer into a bowl, and set aside.

3 Wipe skillet clean and return to medium-high heat. Add pumpkin seeds and peanuts, and cook, swirling pan often, until nuts are lightly toasted, about 5 minutes; transfer to a blender, and return skillet to heat. Add sesame seeds, and cook, swirling pan often, until lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Transfer to blender along with 3 cups reserved cooking liquid, and purée until very smooth, at least 2 minutes; set aside.

4 Return saucepan to medium-high heat, and add oil. When hot, add vegetable and nut purées, and fry, whisking constantly, until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Stir in remaining cooking liquid, and cook until smooth, about 5 minutes more. Spoon the sauce over chicken to serve.

Pescado Encarcelado

(Fish Stuffed with Pico de Gallo)

SERVES 4

This clean, flavorful preparation of whole fish stuffed with *pico de gallo* (pictured on page 27) preserves all the fish's natural juices. Mullet is typically used, but red snapper works just as well.

- 2 tbsp. minced jalapeños
- 4 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored and finely chopped

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Baja's Best Bottles

Mexico's wine industry is the oldest in the Americas: In 1524, after conquering the Aztecs, the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés ordered colonists to plant grape vines. Ships sailing from Spain brought cuttings to the New World, where they thrived.

Today, Mexico's biggest wine region is the Baja peninsula, on the country's northwest coast. Baja's Valle de Guadalupe lies about 15 miles inland of the city of Ensenada, where cooling Pacific breezes and the sheltering Sierra Nevada mountains temper the dry heat of the Sonoran desert, creating the perfect microclimate for growing grapes.

On a recent visit there, I found a range of delicious bottles, many with a uniquely briny quality derived from the peninsula's slightly saline water table. You can taste it in the Paralelo Ensemble Arenal BA II 2008 (\$37; winesfrombaja.com), a spicy, salty, earthy cabernet-merlot blend that is perfect with grilled

meats. Also touched by brine but with rich cherry and bacon notes, the cabernet-merlot blend Viñas Pijoan Leonora 2008 (\$36; winesfrombaja.com) goes great with smoky-sweet *mole poblano*. La Trinidad Fauno 2009 (\$38; winesfrombaja.com), a nebbiolo-cabernet-zinfandel blend with hints of tobacco and stewed fruit, stands up to spicy dishes, while the peppery, herbaceous Balché Zinfandel 2008 (\$95; baronbalche.com) is a nuanced wine that you can pair with everything from chiles rellenos to chicken *guisado*.

Though many Baja reds are blends, some of the best whites are single varietals. These run the gamut from the bright, citrus-and-apple Paralelo Emblema 2010 (\$25; winesfrombaja.com)—a sauvignon blanc to sip with seafood—to buttery yet balanced Monte Xanic Chardonnay (\$19; winesfrombaja.com), whose toasted almond and tropical fruit flavors make it a match for creamy dishes like *enchiladas suizas*. —Shane Mitchell

pan over high heat, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until tender, about 45 minutes. Drain; set aside.

2 Meanwhile, arrange an oven rack 4" from broiler element, and heat broiler to high. Place garlic, tomato, tomatillo, and onion on a foil-lined baking sheet, and broil, turning as needed, until all vegetables are charred all over, about 15 minutes. Transfer vegetables to food processor, and process until smooth; set vegetable purée aside.

3 Heat butter in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add reserved chile seeds, cloves, all-spice, coriander, peppercorns, anise seeds, and canela, and cook, stirring constantly, until lightly toasted and fragrant, about 6 minutes. Add plantain, and cook, stirring, until lightly browned, about 12 minutes. Add tortilla, and cook, stirring, until lightly toasted, about 6 minutes. Add almonds and sesame seeds, and cook, stirring, until lightly toasted, about 8 minutes. Add reserved chile purée and vegetable purée, along with raisins and bread, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until all ingredients are softened, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat, and transfer mole to blender along with remaining soaking liquid; purée until very smooth, at least 4 minutes.

4 Return saucepan to medium-high heat, and add lard. When hot, add mole and fry, whisking constantly, until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Add chocolate, piloncillo, and salt, and cook until chocolate and sugar dissolve and sauce is smooth, about 10 minutes. Arrange chicken on a platter, liberally cover with the sauce, and sprinkle with sesame seeds; serve with red rice, if you like.

Pollo Pibil

(Yucatán-Style Chicken with Achiote)

SERVES 4-6

Marinated in a crimson achiote-

- 1 medium white onion, minced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 1-lb. whole red snappers, cleaned and butterflied
- 1 lime, cut into 4 wedges

1 Combine jalapeños, Worcestershire, tomatoes, and onion in a bowl; season with salt and pepper, and set pico de gallo aside. Heat broiler to high.

2 Place each fish, backbone side down, on a 12" x 12" square of foil, and crimp foil around bottom of fish to form a canoe shape. Season fish with salt and pepper, and divide pico de gallo between fish cavities. Transfer fish packets to a rimmed baking sheet, and broil until fish is cooked through and charred at the edges, about 15 minutes. Serve fish with lime wedges for squeezing over before eating.

Pollo en Mole Poblano

(Chicken with Puebla-Style Mole Sauce)

SERVES 8

Mexico's most iconic mole, this preparation marries mulato, ancho, and

pasilla chiles with warm spices to create a velvety smooth sauce (pictured on [page 32](#)) ideal for spooning over chicken.

- 2 oz. dried mulato chiles
- 1 oz. dried ancho chiles (see [page 90](#))
- 1 oz. dried pasilla chiles (see [page 90](#))
- 1 3-4-lb. whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- ½ small plum tomato, cored
- ½ medium tomatillo, husks removed, rinsed
- ¼ small white onion, peeled
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ½ tsp. whole cloves
- ½ tsp. whole allspice berries
- ¼ tsp. coriander seeds
- ¼ tsp. whole black peppercorns
- ¼ tsp. anise seeds
- ½ stick cinnamon, preferably canela (see [page 90](#))
- ¼ ripe plantain or banana, peeled and finely chopped
- ½ small corn tortilla, roughly chopped
- 3 tbsp. whole almonds
- 1½ tbsp. sesame seeds, plus more for garnish

- 2 tbsp. raisins
- ¼ stale bolillo (see [page 98](#)) or 1 slice white sandwich bread, toasted and crumbled
- 1 tbsp. lard or canola oil
- 2 oz. Mexican chocolate, such as Ibarra, roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped piloncillo (see [page 91](#)) or packed light brown sugar
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- Mexican-style red rice, for serving (see [page 100](#) for a recipe)

1 Heat a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add mulato, ancho, and pasilla chiles, and cook, turning once, until toasted, about 2 minutes. Transfer all chiles to a large bowl; pour over 5 cups boiling water and let sit until chiles are soft, about 30 minutes. Drain, reserving soaking liquid, and remove stems and seeds from chiles, reserving 1 tsp. seeds from chiles. Set seeds aside, and transfer chiles to a food processor; add 1 cup soaking liquid, and process until smooth. Set chile purée and remaining soaking liquid aside. Bring chicken and 8 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. sauce-

Mexican Snack Foods

The packaged snacks of Mexico are rooted in the spicy, sour, salty, and sweet flavors of the country's cuisine. Many of them are available in Mexican groceries in the U.S., or on mexgrocer.com.

1 **Cacahuates Japanese**, or Japanese-style roasted peanuts, encased in a sweetened wheat flour crust seasoned with soy sauce, are often eaten drenched with hot sauce. Created in 1945 by Yoshigei Nakatani, a Japanese immigrant to Mexico City, they're a ubiquitous *botana*, or bar food. Tart tamarind candies come in many forms, including 2 **Skwinklote**, a chewy, chile- and pineapple-flavored candy with a tamarind center. Along with such contemporary snacks, there are traditional treats like 3 **mazapán de cacahuete**, melt-in-the-mouth disks of toasted, sweetened peanut paste. 4 **Chicle**, or chewing gum, from native rubber trees, dates back to pre-Columbian times; tropical flavors like banana are popular. Some sweets mimic savory foods, like 5 **Salsagheti**, watermelon-flavored, chile-coated "pasta" that comes with a packet of spicy tamarind sauce. 6 **Limón 7**, a salt and lemon powder poured straight into one's mouth or eaten with a spoon, is deliciously intense. A classic snack on the sweet side, *cajeta*, or caramelized goats' or cows' milk, appears in many forms. 7 **Obleas** sandwich a chewy version of the caramel between thin wheat wafers, also called *obleas*, which are themselves a popular street snack. 8 **Glorias**, another caramel treat, are rolled with chopped pecans into logs. Chewy 9 **Pulparindo** fruit-leather bars, made from tamarind pulp, salt, chiles, and a bit of sugar, are more savory than sweet, particularly in the red-packaged *picante* style. The lollipops called 10 **paletas de cajeta**, made of hard cows'-milk caramel, melt into creamy richness in the mouth. *Frituras*, a genre that includes potato chips and other fried snacks, are often eaten at street stalls doused in lime juice, hot sauce, and salt. These packaged potato chips, called 11 **Adobadas** after the Spanish word for "marinated," come already flavored with acid, spice, and salt. The macaroon-like 12 **Bandera de Coco**, or "coconut flag," dressed in the national colors, is one of many coconut candies enjoyed in Mexico. 13 **Vero Mango** epitomizes the complex layering in Mexican confections: Within the salty chile paste coating is a sweet mango lollipop. —Javier Cabral, author of the blog *The Glutster* (theglutster.com)





Toasting Dried Chiles “To activate the flavors of dried chiles, toast them before adding them to a sauce, as in the recipe for pambazos [see below]. Cook them on a dry comal or skillet over medium-high heat until they become fragrant and deepen slightly in color. There’s a fine line between toasting and burning, and some chiles cook faster than others. Use your senses to judge timing: The aroma should be round, deep, and intense, not sharp and charred.” —Iliana de la Vega

and-citrus marinade and served with pickled onions, this chicken dish (pictured on [page 50](#)) is eaten all over the Yucatán. It gets an additional layer of flavor from the banana leaves that line the inside of the pot, but should you opt not to use them, the result will still be delicious.

- 1 cup fresh orange juice
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup fresh grapefruit juice
- 4 oz. achiote paste, such as El Yucateco (see [page 90](#))
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 3 28”-long frozen, thawed banana leaves (optional)
- 1 3–4-lb. whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- Pickled red onions, for serving (see [page 98](#) for a recipe)
- Warm tortillas, for serving

1 Combine juices, achiote paste, and salt in a blender, and purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into a medium bowl; set sauce aside.

2 Line the bottom of a 6-qt. Dutch oven with 2 crisscrossed banana leaves, if using, letting the excess hang over the side of the pot. Add chicken pieces to pot, and pour over sauce. Tear remaining banana leaf into small pieces, and scatter over top of chicken. Fold excess of banana leaves over top of chicken, and place lid on pot. Place pot over medium-high heat, and bring sauce inside to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 45 minutes.

3 To serve, uncover pot and peel back banana leaves. Divide chicken among serving bowls, discarding pieces of banana leaves, and serve with plenty of sauce from the pot, along with pickled onions and tortillas, if you like.

Huevos Motuleños

(Eggs in Tortillas with Ham and Peas)

SERVES 4

This Yucatán-style breakfast dish (pictured on [page 51](#)), topped with peas, ham, and Gouda or Edam cheese, has a spicy habanero and tomato sauce.

- 1 cup canned black beans
- 2 habanero chiles, stemmed and seeded
- 2 sprigs epazote (see [page 90](#)) or cilantro
- 1 medium white onion, cut into thick slices
- 3 tbsp. lard (see [page 91](#)) or canola oil
- 1 lb. plum tomatoes, cored
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 5 tbsp. canola oil, plus more for frying
- 8 corn tortillas
- 1 small, ripe plantain or large banana, peeled and cut into ¼” slices
- 4 eggs
- 2 oz. deli-sliced ham, cut into ½” strips
- 2 oz. deli-sliced Gouda or Edam, cut into ½” strips
- ½ cup canned peas
- ¼ cup crumbled queso Cotija (see [page 90](#))

1 Purée beans, 1 chile, epazote, ¼ the onion, and ¼ cup water in a blender until very smooth, at least 2 minutes. Heat lard in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Add bean purée, and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened to a loose paste, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set beans aside.

2 Wipe skillet clean, and return to heat; add remaining chile, onion quarters, and tomatoes, and cook, turning as needed, until charred all over, about 14 minutes for chile and tomatoes, about 12 minutes for onions. Transfer to a blender along with salt, and purée until very smooth, at least 2 minutes. Return skillet to heat along with 3 tbsp. oil; when hot, pour salsa into skillet, and cook, stirring constantly, until slightly reduced and thick-

ened, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and keep warm.

3 Pour oil to a depth of 2” in a 6-qt. Dutch oven, and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 360°. Working in batches, add tortillas, and fry, turning once, until crisp and golden brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer to paper towels and set aside. Add plantain or banana slices to oil, and fry until tender and caramelized, about 2 minutes. Wipe skillet clean, and return to medium heat with remaining 2 tbsp. oil. Add eggs to skillet, and cook to desired doneness, about 4 minutes for over easy.

4 Spread about 3 tbsp. black beans over 4 tortillas on serving plates, and then place an egg on top. Cover eggs with remaining tortillas, and pour salsa over tortillas; arrange ham and Gouda or Edam slices on top; top with peas; and sprinkle with Cotija. Place fried plantain or banana slices around tortillas to serve.

Molletes

(Mexican Bean and Cheese Sandwiches)

SERVES 8

The *bolillo*, a French-style crusty white bread roll from Mexico, is the traditional foundation of this comforting dish (pictured on [page 42](#)), but a kaiser or most any other sandwich roll will work well.

For the salsa:

- 2 lb. plum tomatoes, cored, and cut into ½” cubes
- ⅔ cup roughly chopped cilantro
- 6 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 1 large white onion, finely chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste

For the beans and rolls:

- ½ cup lard (see [page 91](#)) or canola oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small white onion, finely chopped

- 2 cups chicken stock
- 3 15-oz. cans pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 bolillos (see [page 98](#)) or kaiser rolls, split
- 12 oz. queso Oaxaca, grated (see [page 90](#))

1 To make the salsa, combine tomatoes, cilantro, chiles, and onion in a bowl, and season liberally with salt; fold gently to combine. Cover, and refrigerate, for about 1 hour.

2 To make the refried beans, heat lard in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Add garlic and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add stock and beans, and cook, stirring and mashing, until almost all beans are smooth and mixture is slightly soupy, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and keep warm.

3 Heat broiler to high. Using your fingers, scoop out and discard the insides of rolls, leaving a ½”-thick shell. Place roll halves on a foil-lined baking sheet with their cut sides up, and broil until lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Pour about ½ cup refried beans over each roll half so that the beans are spilling over the edges, and then sprinkle with cheese. Return to broiler, and heat until beans are heated through and cheese is just melted, but not browned, about 2 minutes. Transfer one roll half to each serving plate, and top each with a couple large spoonfuls of salsa. Serve immediately.

Pambazos

(Salsa-Dipped Potato and Chorizo Sandwiches)

SERVES 6

These salsa-dunked and griddled sandwiches (pictured on [page 88](#)), an iconic Mexico City street food, are named for the *pambazos*—soft, oval rolls—they’re typically made with. *Telera* and kaiser rolls make fine substitutes



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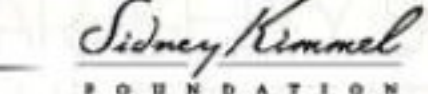
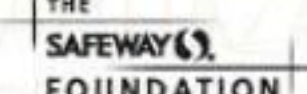
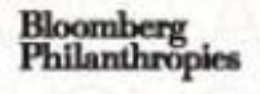
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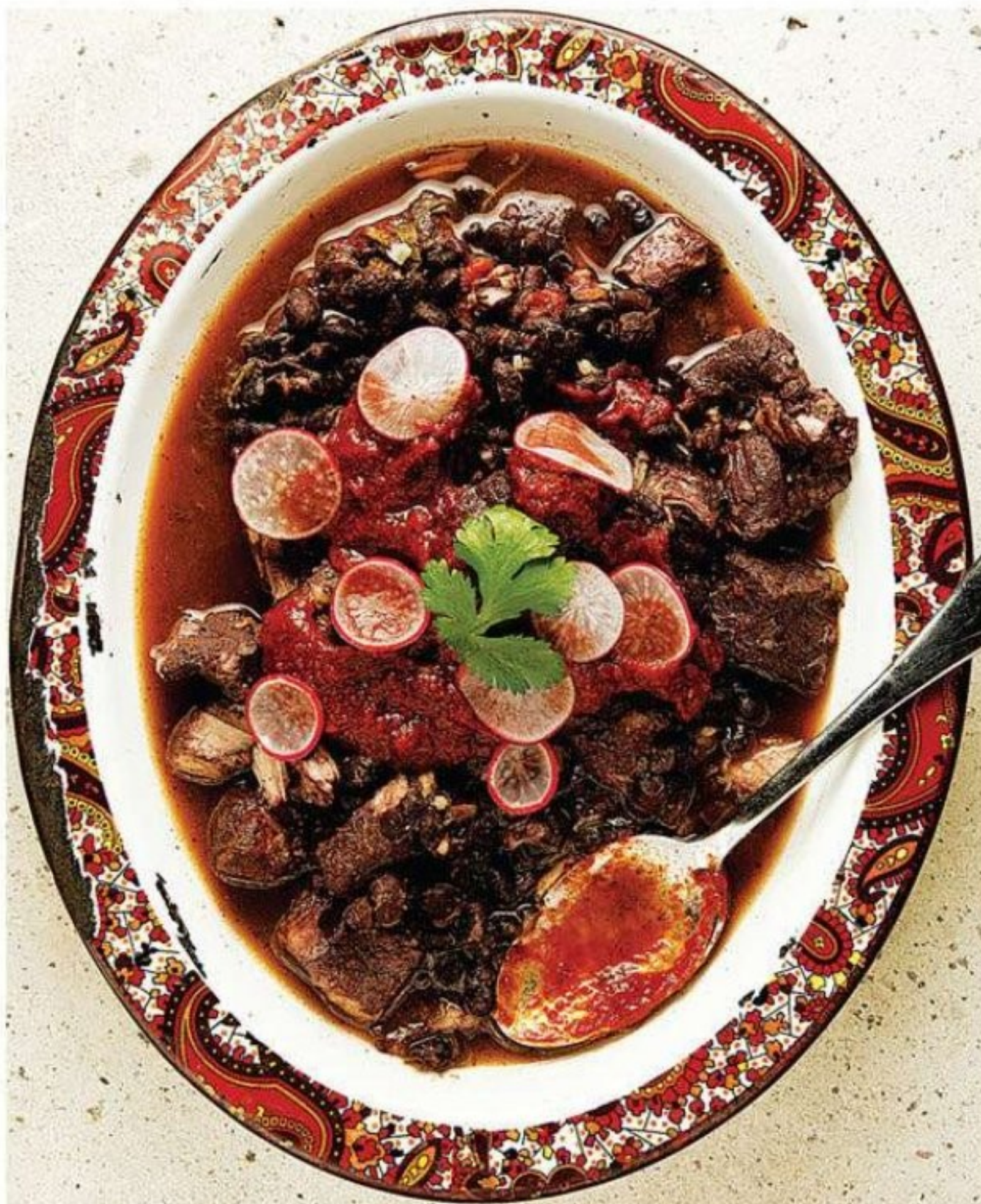
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Pambazos, salsa-dipped potato and chorizo sandwiches (see [page 86](#) for a recipe).



Frijol con puerco, pork and black bean stew (see [page 92](#) for a recipe).



Caldo de res, beef and guajillo chile stew (see [page 92](#) for a recipe).



Chiles en nogada, stuffed poblano chiles with walnut sauce (see [page 92](#) for a recipe).

Four Mexican Drinks

From steaming hot, thick *atoles* made of sweet, nourishing corn to fruity *aguas frescas* and spicy eye-openers like the *Michelada*, Mexico's many *bebidas*, or drinks, are as vividly colorful, full of flavor, enticing, and satisfying as the foods they accompany. —Ben Mims

Agua de Jamaica (Sweet Hibiscus Drink)

MAKES 5 CUPS

This sweet-tart drink (pictured, right) is a popular streetside cooler. To make it, bring 5 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat. Add 1½ cups sugar, and cook, stirring, until sugar dissolves, about 1 minute. Remove from heat, stir in 2 cups (about 2 oz.) dried hibiscus flowers (see [page 91](#)), 3 whole allspice, and 1 stick cinnamon, preferably *canela* (see [page 90](#)); let sit, covered, at room temperature for 1 hour. Pour through a fine strainer into a pitcher, discard solids; chill for 2 hours. Pour over ice to serve.



Atole de Mora Negra (Blackberry Masa Drink)

MAKES 4 DRINKS

Ruben Ortega, pastry chef at Hugo's in Houston, Texas, gave us the recipe for this fruity atole (right). Bring 1 stick cinnamon, preferably *canela* (see [page 90](#)), and 4 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat, and cook for 10 minutes; reduce heat to medium. Purée 12 oz. blackberries, ½ cup masa harina (see [page 91](#)), and 1 cup water in a blender until smooth. Pour through a fine strainer into simmering water along with 6 tbsp. sugar; cook, stirring, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat; pour into serving glasses.



Michelada con Camarones (Spicy Beer Cocktail with Shrimp)

MAKES 4 DRINKS

To make this cantina favorite, pour some lime juice and chili powder onto two plates; dip rims of 4 pint-size beer mugs in juice, then chili powder. Dip tops of 24 cooked, peeled shrimp in chili powder; set aside. Purée 2¼ cups Clamato juice, ½ cup lime juice, ¼ cup orange juice, 1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce, ¾ tsp. black pepper, ¼ tsp. salt, 1 clove garlic, and ½ serrano chile, stemmed, in a blender. Divide among mugs; fill with ice; top with 4 dark lagers. Place 6 shrimp each on 4 skewers; place a skewer across each mug.



Agua de Piña con Nopal (Pineapple and Cactus Drink)

MAKES 4-6 DRINKS

The recipe for this thirst-quencher comes from Hugo Ortega's *Street Food of Mexico* (Bright Sky Press, 2012). Combine ½ cup sugar, 1 small nopal (cactus paddle; see [page 91](#)), cleaned of spikes and roughly chopped, ½ ripe pineapple, peeled, cored, and roughly chopped, ½ large Granny Smith apple, unpeeled, cored, and roughly chopped, and 3¼ cups water in a blender, and purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into a pitcher, and chill in the refrigerator. Pour over ice in glasses to serve.

15 dried guajillo chiles (see [page 91](#))

1 clove garlic

½ small white onion, roughly chopped

Kosher salt, to taste

2¼ lb. Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ½" cubes

½ cup canola oil

1¼ lb. fresh chorizo, casings removed

6 soft pambazos, teleras (see [page 98](#)), or kaiser rolls, split

3 cups shredded iceberg lettuce

2 cups grated queso Oaxaca (see [page 90](#)) or mozzarella

¾ cup crema (see [page 90](#)) or sour cream

1 Heat a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add chiles, and cook, turning once, until toasted, about 2 minutes. Transfer all chiles to a large bowl; pour over

4 cups boiling water, and let sit until chiles are soft, about 30 minutes. Drain, reserving 1¼ cups soaking liquid, and remove stems and seeds from chiles. Transfer chiles and reserved soaking liquid to a blender along with garlic and onion; purée until very smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour sauce into a bowl; set aside.

2 Bring a 4-qt. saucepan of salted water to a boil over high heat; add potatoes, and cook until just tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and set aside. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 12" skillet over medium heat; add chorizo, and cook, stirring to break up into small pieces, until browned and cooked through, about 8 minutes. Add potatoes, and cook until potatoes are very tender, about 2 minutes; season with salt and pepper and set aside.

3 Using your fingers, scoop out and

discard the insides of rolls, leaving a ½"-thick shell. Place about 1 cup potato-chorizo mixture on roll bottoms, and cover with tops; press sandwiches lightly to flatten and compact filling. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Submerge two sandwiches in chile sauce until thoroughly soaked, at least 10 seconds; place in skillet, and cook, pressing constantly with a metal spatula to flatten and flipping once, until browned on both sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board; repeat with remaining oil, sandwiches, and sauce. Open sandwiches and divide lettuce, cheese, and crema among sandwiches; close sandwiches again and serve warm.

Chiles Rellenos con Picadillo

(Poblano Chiles Stuffed with Spiced Beef)

SERVES 8

This stuffed, fried chile (pictured on [page 78](#)), a specialty of Julín Contreras of Restaurante Pueblo Mio in the town of Tehuantepec, in southeastern Oaxaca state, has a sumptuous ground beef filling dotted with olives and raisins.

For the picadillo:

¼ cup canola oil

4 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 small white onion, finely chopped

2 lb. ground beef

1 tsp. ground Mexican *canela* (see [page 90](#)) or cinnamon

1 bay leaf

¼ cup plus 2 tbsp. finely chopped pimienta-stuffed green olives

¼ cup blanched, slivered almonds, finely chopped

¼ cup raisins, finely chopped

The Mexican Pantry

As we visited markets and kitchens across Mexico while putting together this issue, we received an invaluable education in the ingredients and equipment that give Mexican cooking its singular intensity and depth of flavor. When we began to test recipes back in the *SAVEUR* kitchen, we found that all these workhorses of the Mexican kitchen are readily available in the United States, at Latin American markets and through mail order. Get to know these basic elements, and you'll be well on your way to grasping the art and ingenuity behind one of the world's great cuisines. —Sanaë Lemoine and Eesha Sardesai



Dried Mexican oregano is usually sold with some edible stems included. It's an entirely different plant from Mediterranean oregano, with a brasher, earthier flavor suited to sauces and stews like beef-and-guajillo *caldo de res* (see [page 92](#) for a recipe). [ranchogordo.com](#)



We love **queso Oaxaca**, a mild, stringy cheese that's sold, like fresh mozzarella, in balls, as well as in ropey braids. It melts beautifully and brings rich, creamy flavor to dishes like *molletes*, bean-and-cheese sandwiches (see [page 86](#) for a recipe). [mexgrocer.com](#)



The thin wheat-flour noodles called **fideos** came to Mexico with the Spanish. They're typically sold dried in bundles and broken into smaller pieces to use in casseroles or in soups like *sopa de fideo* (see [page 74](#) for a recipe). [mexgrocer.com](#)



El Yucateco achiote seasoning is a ready-made *recado rojo*, the red spice paste from the Yucatán. Made with garlic, achiote, and vinegar, it gives bright flavor and color to *pollo pibil* (Yucatán-style chicken with achiote; see [page 84](#) for a recipe). [mexgrocer.com](#)



Squash blossoms can be stuffed with cheese and fried, stirred into soups like *caldo Xóchitl con flor de calabaza* (squash blossom soup; see [page 70](#) for a recipe), or used to fill tacos or quesadillas. Find them in farmers' markets, or online year-round. [melissas.com](#)



Ancho chiles—poblanos in their dried form—bring fruity and slightly acidic notes to sauces such as *mole poblano* (see [page 84](#) for a recipe). Look for ones that are pliant—if they're brittle, they're old and likely diminished in flavor. [marxfoods.com](#)



The spice classified as true cinnamon, or **canela** in Spanish, is softer in character than the cassia often labeled cinnamon in the U.S. It sings in everything from stews to sweets. Once ground it loses flavor fast, so buy it whole and grind as needed. [ranchogordo.com](#)



Crema is a mild-tasting cultured cream used to enrich soups and sauces and to garnish any number of dishes. You can also substitute crème fraîche or sour cream, thinned with a little milk or heavy cream, to get the right consistency for drizzling. [mexgrocer.com](#)



Cotija, a hard, aged cows' milk cheese, has a salty flavor reminiscent of feta's. It's grated and sprinkled over countless savory dishes as a garnish. In some places it is labeled as *queso añejo* ("aged cheese") or *queso seco* ("dry cheese"). [mexgrocer.com](#)



Epazote grows as a weed in much of the U.S., but in Mexico it's an herb prized for its bold, citrusy, slightly resinous flavor. Cooks add a sprig to black bean dishes like *frijol con puerco* (see [page 92](#) for a recipe), for a note of bright pungency. [melissas.com](#)



Tomatillos, encased in papery husks, bring tart, fruity flavor to *salsa verde* (see [page 102](#) for a recipe) and the sauce for *enchiladas suizas* (see [page 95](#) for a recipe). Smaller ones, about the size of a walnut in the shell, have more concentrated flavor. [melissas.com](#)



Nutritious, oil-rich **pepitas** are the seeds of pumpkin-like calabaza squash. Lightly pan-toast the seeds to bring out their nutty flavor. These enrich the sauce for *pollo en pipián verde* (chicken with pumpkin seed-tomatillo sauce; see [page 82](#) for a recipe). [mexgrocer.com](#)



Pasilla chiles have a rich flavor and midrange heat that make them a versatile ingredient in everything from cooked sauces like *mole poblano* (see [page 84](#) for a recipe) to table salsas. The seeds can also be toasted to make a flavorful garnish. [marxfood.com](#)



The hibiscus flower—**flor de jamaica** in Spanish—thrives in subtropical Mexico. Its dried blooms, sold in bulk, can be steeped in sweetened water to make a tart, bright red syrup used in the drink *agua de jamaica* (see [page 89](#) for a recipe). [mountainroseherbs.com](#)



Queso fresco is a pleasantly acidic fresh cows' milk cheese. Sometimes sold wrapped in banana leaves, it's used for stuffing *tortas* (sandwiches) and enchiladas, and for crumbling over dishes like *chalupas poblanas* (see [page 68](#) for a recipe). [mexgrocer.com](#)



Slender and brick red when dried, the **chile de árbol** is one of the hotter peppers used in Mexican cooking. It has a strong, sharp flavor that intensifies with toasting, lending complexity as well as heat to many different kinds of salsa. [marxfoods.com](#)



Flat-bottomed **cazuelas** are the ultimate stove-to-table cookware. The pots, ceramic with a glazed interior, are used to make rice and sauces such as *mole poblano* (see [page 84](#) for a recipe). Opt for quality: Cheaper ones may be painted with lead-based glazes. [mexgrocer.com](#)



If you've had guacamole made tableside, you've seen a **molcajete** in action. This heavy, three-legged mortar-and-pestle, often made of volcanic rock, has been used for centuries to grind whole spices and herbs, to make salsas, and, yes, to pulverize avocados. [mexgrocer.com](#)



Smoke-dried jalapeños, called **chipotle chiles**, come in a two types: Chile *meco* (pictured) is large and tobacco brown; chile *mora* is smaller and red-brown. The latter is less sweet and more astringent, but either will add a round, smoky flavor to dishes. [melissas.com](#)



Camarón seco, cooked, salted, and partially or fully dried shrimp, bring funky, umami notes to foods like *salsa con camarón seco* (see [page 103](#) for a recipe). They can be used with heads intact, but be sure to first remove the bitter-tasting eyes. [melissas.com](#)



Masa harina is a flour made from corn that's been soaked in slaked lime to soften and then dried before grinding. The type for making tortillas (see [page 78](#) for a recipe) is finely ground; a coarser version for making tamales is usually labeled as such. [mexgrocer.com](#)



To make **piloncillo**, juice extracted from sugar cane is boiled and reduced, then poured into molds to harden. The resulting unrefined brown sugar has a rich, complex sweetness that enhances desserts as well as savory dishes. [mexgrocer.com](#)



Though some cooks are skilled enough to shape tortillas by hand, a **tortilla press** is the best means for getting thin, consistent results. Purchase a sturdy wood or iron model; when closed, no light should be visible between the two plates. [mexicanimports.com](#)



Nopales, spiny paddles of the prickly pear cactus used in soups, salads, salsas, and pickles, have a vegetal flavor with a pleasant bitter edge. To strip them of thorns, grip them by the base and scrape off the thorns with a knife held flush against the paddle. [melissas.com](#)



Manteca pura, or rendered pork lard, is used in all kinds of Mexican dishes, from tamales to refried beans. Unlike the snow-white lard sold in the U.S., it's rendered by cooking, which gives it a caramel color, creamy texture, and meaty flavor. [emperorfood.com](#)



Guajillo chiles bring brightness and tartness to rubs, stews, and sauces, like the one used to dip the potato-chorizo sandwiches called *pambazos* (see [page 86](#) for a recipe). Look for guajillos of even color that are not too brittle. [marxfood.com](#)



The **molinillo** is an intricately carved wooden whisk used for mixing and frothing beverages such as hot chocolate (see [page 103](#) for a recipe). To use, submerge the tool in the liquid while rolling the handle between the palms of your hands. [deandeluca.com](#)



The **comal**, a griddle, is used to cook tortillas, toast dried chiles, and char fresh aromatics. Earthenware comals are traditional, but they're rarely found north of the border; iron versions, similar to French crêpe pans, are more common Stateside. [mexgrocer.com](#)



Peeling Walnuts “Before making the chiles en nogada [see recipe below], remove the walnuts’ skins; otherwise the sauce will taste bitter. Loosen the skins by boiling the nuts for 5 minutes, then drain the nuts in a colander, and blast them with your sink’s spray hose. If you don’t have a spray hose, scrub the nuts with a brush under running water.” —Hugo Ortega

- 2 tbsp. finely chopped pickled jalapeños
- 1 15-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

For the chiles:

- 8 poblano chiles
- 2 cups canola oil
- 1 cup flour
- 4 eggs, separated
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Salsa roja, to serve (see [page 102](#) for a recipe)
- Crumbled Cotija and chopped cilantro, for garnish

1 Make the picadillo: Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add garlic and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add beef, and cook, stirring, until browned and all liquid is evaporated, about 12 minutes. Drain off any oil or fat in pot and discard; return pot to heat. Add cinnamon and bay leaf, and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add olives, almonds, raisins, jalapeños, and tomatoes, and cook, stirring until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and season with salt and pepper; set aside.

2 Make the chiles: Heat broiler to high. Place poblano chiles on a foil-lined baking sheet and broil, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 20 minutes. Transfer chiles to a bowl, and let cool. Peel and discard skins and stems; cut a slit down the length of each chile. Remove and discard seeds and ribs, keeping chile intact. Place about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup picadillo inside each chile, and tightly close chile around filling. Refrigerate until ready to use.

3 Heat oil in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, place flour on a shallow plate, and set aside. Beat egg whites in a

bowl until soft peaks form; whisk in egg yolks, and season with salt and pepper. Working in batches, dredge each chile in flour, shaking off excess, and then coat in egg batter. Place in oil, and fry, flipping once, until golden brown and filling is heated through, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer chiles to a wire rack to drain. Transfer to serving plates and drizzle with salsa, if you like; top with cheese and cilantro before serving.

Frijol con Puerco

(Pork and Black Bean Stew)

SERVES 6–8

In this dish (pictured on [page 88](#)), from Jorge Boneta, former chef at the Hotel Matilda in San Miguel de Allende, the pork and beans cook together, which enhances the flavor of each ingredient.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup canola oil
- 2 lb. boneless pork shoulder, cut into 2” cubes
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 8 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 medium white onions, thinly sliced
- 1 lb. dried black beans, soaked overnight
- 4 sprigs epazote (see [page 90](#)) or cilantro
- 1 lb. plum tomatoes, cored
- 2 habanero chiles, stemmed
- 2 baby radishes, very thinly sliced, for garnish
- Cilantro leaves, to garnish
- Cooked white rice, for serving
- Lime wedges, for serving

1 Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season pork with salt and pepper, and working in batches, add to pan, and cook, turning as needed, until browned on all sides, about 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer pork to a plate; cover and set aside. Add two-thirds of the garlic, one-quarter of the onions to pan, and cook, stirring until soft, about 5 minutes. Return

pork to pot along with beans, epazote, and 8 cups water, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until beans and pork are tender, about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, heat a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Add tomatoes and chiles, and cook, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a blender along with remaining garlic and onions, and purée until sauce is smooth. Return skillet to heat and add remaining oil; when the oil is hot, add sauce, and fry, stirring constantly, until sauce is slightly reduced, about 8 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and keep tomato sauce warm.

3 To serve, transfer beans and pork to a large, deep serving platter and drizzle with tomato sauce. Top with radishes and cilantro leaves, and serve with rice and lime wedges.

Caldo de Res

(Beef and Guajillo Chile Stew)

SERVES 8

Infused with smoky guajillo chiles, this nourishing, slow-cooked stew (pictured on [page 88](#)) is usually made with various tough cuts of beef, but we found oxtails to be the most flavorful choice. Served with rice, this dish is a favorite meal across Mexico.

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. beef oxtails, cut into 2” lengths
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 small white onion, quartered
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 dried guajillo chiles, stemmed (see [page 91](#))
- 1 plum tomato, cored and quartered
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 lb. small Yukon gold potatoes
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- Cooked white rice, for serving
- Lime wedges, for serving

1 Bring oxtails, 2 cloves garlic, 1 quarter of onion, and 6 cups water to a boil in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat, and season with salt and pepper; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until beef is tender, about 2 hours. Using tongs, transfer oxtails to a bowl and set aside. Pour cooking liquid through a fine strainer into a bowl and discard solids; set cooking liquid aside.

2 Meanwhile, place chiles in a bowl and cover with 2 cups boiling water; let sit until soft, about 30 minutes. Transfer chiles and soaking liquid along with remaining garlic and onion and tomato to a blender; purée until smooth, at least 2 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into a bowl, and set chile purée aside.

3 Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add chile purée, and cook, stirring constantly, until slightly reduced, about 8 minutes. Stir in cooking liquid, and then return oxtails to pan along with potatoes and oregano, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and serve with rice and lime wedges.

Chiles en Nogada

(Stuffed Poblano Chiles with Walnut Sauce)

SERVES 12

Traditionally made in Puebla to celebrate Mexican Independence Day on September 16, these chiles (pictured on [page 88](#)) have a minced pork filling enhanced with chopped fruit, and a creamy walnut sauce.

For the filling:

- 8 oz. pork loin
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled, plus 2 finely chopped
- 1 large white onion, halved
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp. lard (see [page 91](#)) or canola oil
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley

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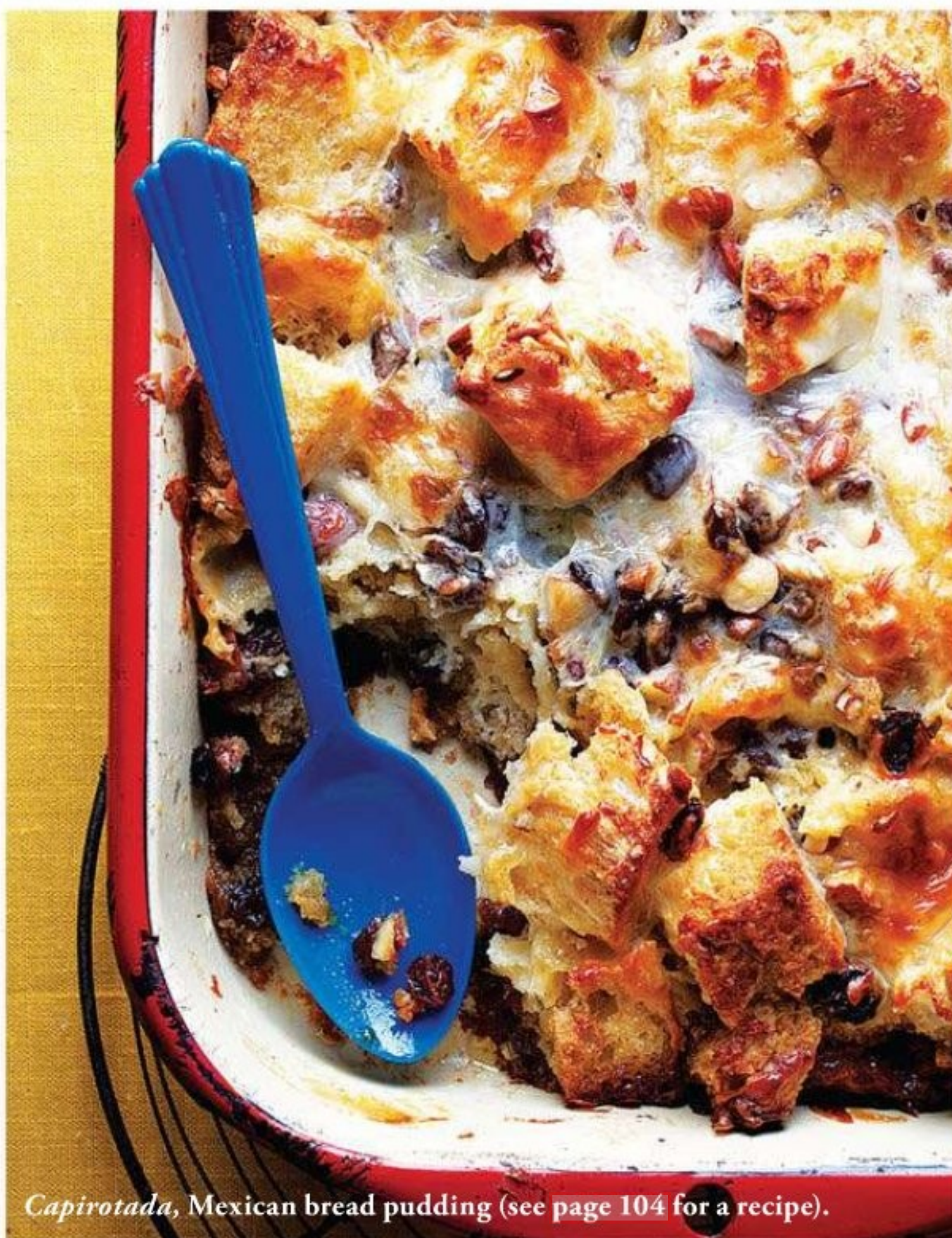
Churros, fritters served with hot chocolate (see page 103 for a recipe).



Raspado de mango, mango ice (see page 104 for a recipe).



Polvorones, pecan shortbread cookies (see page 104 for a recipe).



Capirotada, Mexican bread pudding (see page 104 for a recipe).

- 3 plum tomatoes, cored, peeled, and finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. raisins
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped blanched almonds
- ½ Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and finely chopped
- ½ pear, peeled, cored, and finely chopped
- ½ peach, peeled, pitted, and finely chopped
- ½ medium ripe plantain or banana, peeled and finely chopped

For the walnut sauce:

- 4 oz. walnuts
- ½ cup milk
- 6 oz. queso fresco (see page 91)
- 1 cup crema (see page 90) or sour cream
- 2 tbsp. sherry
- 3 tbsp. sugar
- Kosher salt, to taste

For the chiles:

- 12 poblano chiles
- 2 cups canola oil, for frying
- 1 cup flour
- 5 eggs, separated
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tbsp. distilled white vinegar
- Seeds of 1 pomegranate

1 Make the filling: Bring pork, 2 whole cloves garlic, half the onion, and 2 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; season with salt, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until pork is tender, about 1 hour. Transfer pork to a cutting board, and pour cooking liquid through a fine strainer into a bowl; reserve ½ cup cooking liquid, and discard any remaining along with solids. Once cool, finely chop pork, and set aside with cooking liquid. Return saucepan to medium-high heat, and add lard; finely chop remaining onion, and add to pan along with minced garlic, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add parsley and tomatoes, and cook, stirring, until tomatoes break down, about 5 min-

utes. Return pork and cooking liquid to pan along with raisins, almonds, apple, pear, peach, and plantain, and cook, stirring occasionally, until fruit is cooked through and mixture is thick, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat, and season with salt; set aside.

2 Make the walnut sauce: Place walnuts in a 2-qt. saucepan, and cover with water; bring to a boil, and cook for 5 minutes. Drain, and use a stiff-bristled brush to peel away most of the skin from walnuts (see “Peeling Walnuts,” on page 92); set aside. Bring milk to just under a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, and add walnuts; let sit, covered, to soften nuts, about 30 minutes. Transfer walnuts and milk to a blender along with queso fresco, crema, sherry, and sugar, and purée until very smooth and thick, at least 2 minutes. Season with salt, and transfer to a bowl; cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

3 For the chiles: Heat broiler to high. Place poblano chiles on a foil-lined baking sheet and broil, turning, until blackened all over, about 20 minutes. Transfer chiles to a bowl, and let cool. Peel and discard skins, stems, and seeds, and cut a slit down the length of each chile. Remove and discard seeds and ribs, keeping chile intact. Place about 2–3 tbsp. filling inside each chile, and close chile around filling to form a tight roll. Refrigerate until ready to use.

4 Heat oil in a 12” skillet over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, place flour on a shallow plate, and set aside. Beat egg whites in a bowl until soft peaks form; whisk in egg yolks, salt, and vinegar. Working in batches, dredge each chile in flour, shaking off excess, and then coat in egg batter. Place in oil, and fry, flipping once, until golden brown and filling is heated through, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer chiles to a wire rack to drain. Transfer to serving plates, and spoon

The Art of Mexican Sauces

One distinctive technique that Mexican cooks use to great effect is frying a sauce. A fried sauce, like those in the recipes for *enchiladas de chile ajo* (page 76) and *pollo en pipián verde* (page 82), has a more intense and complex flavor, a deeper color, and a sumptuous, silky texture. It’s also a great way to give new life to a leftover sauce: A raw *salsa verde* served as a condiment one day can be fried down the next to a thicker, richer topping for eggs and other dishes. The technique requires a heavy pot that can hold an even heat; an enameled cast-iron pot, like those made by Le Creuset, works well. I place it over medium heat; if the heat is too high, the flavors won’t have time to fully develop. I add only a little fat—canola oil or lard—just enough to cover the pot’s bottom; when it shimmers I know it is hot enough. Once the sauce is added, I keep it at a steady simmer, stirring frequently to prevent scorching; I’m careful not to overcook the sauce, as this can make it bitter. Cooking times will vary depending on the ingredients, but as the sauce cooks, the color will darken, and the texture will thicken considerably. You’ll know it is ready when you drag a spoon across the bottom and lay bare a strip of the pot’s surface that remains visible for a few seconds before the sauce closes over it again. At this point, you can dilute the sauce with broth to bring it to just the consistency you want. —*Ilana de la Vega, chef-owner of El Naranjo in Austin, Texas, and chef-instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in San Antonio*

walnut sauce over chiles to cover completely; sprinkle with pomegranate seeds before serving.

Huarache con Carne Asada

(Mexico City–Style Corn Tortillas with Steak)

SERVES 4

Thick, oblong *masa* tortillas (named *huarache*, or sandal, because of their shape) are topped with grated cheese, *salsa roja*, sautéed steak, and sliced cactus in this classic street food (pictured on page 41).

- 1½ cups masa harina (see page 91)
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ½ cup plus 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 cup salsa roja (see page 102 for a recipe)
- 2 oz. queso Cotija, grated (see page 90)
- 4 3-oz. sirloin steaks, pounded to ⅛” thickness
- 1 medium white onion, cut into ¼”-thick slices
- 1 1-lb. 14-oz. can sliced nopales, drained and rinsed
- 2 avocados, halved, pitted, and peeled, for serving

1 Make the huaraches: Combine masa harina, salt, and 1 cup warm water in a large bowl, and stir until a smooth dough forms. Knead dough in bowl until very smooth but not sticky, about 2 minutes. Divide dough into quarters and shape each quarter into a 7”-long, ¼”-thick oval. Heat 1 tbsp. oil in a 12” cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 huarache to skillet, and cook until blackened in spots on bottom, about 3 minutes. Flip and immedi-

ately spread with ¼ cup salsa and ½ oz. cheese; continue cooking until blackened in spots on bottom and cooked through, about 2 minutes more. Transfer to a serving plate. Repeat with 3 tbsp. oil, remaining huaraches, salsa, and cheese.

2 Return skillet to high heat, and add 2 tbsp. oil. Season steaks with salt, and add 2 steaks to skillet; cook, turning once, until browned on both sides and cooked through, about 3 minutes. Place one steak over each huarache, and repeat with 2 tbsp. oil and remaining steaks.

3 Return skillet to high heat, and add remaining oil. Add onion, and cook, stirring often, until just tender, about 5 minutes. Add cactus, and cook until heated through, about 2 minutes. Divide cactus and onions among steaks, and serve immediately with an avocado half on each plate.

Enchiladas Suizas

(Chicken Enchiladas in Tomatillo-Cream Sauce)

SERVES 4–6

This cheesy, creamy dish (pictured on page 44) originated at a Sanborns café in Mexico City in 1950. Its name, “Swiss enchiladas,” alludes to its copious use of dairy.

- 1½ lb. tomatillos, husks removed, rinsed (see page 90)
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed
- 1 cup roughly chopped cilantro
- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ tsp. cumin seeds, toasted
- 4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 poblano chiles, roasted,

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Mexico's Daily Breads

Bread is as much a part of the food culture of Mexico as tortillas. It's almost always on the table, but it's very rarely made at home. Most Mexicans buy their bread at a *panadería* (bakery) or supermarket. There are hundreds of regional loaves, sweet breads, and holiday breads like the ring-shaped *rosca de reyes*, baked for Three Kings Day each January. But for everyday eating, the following three types of rolls are the ones you'll find throughout Mexico and in Mexican groceries and bakeries in the U.S. —*Iliana de la Vega*

1 Bolillo This eight-inch-long, football-shaped roll is crusty on the outside and soft on the inside, like a French baguette. It's split and topped with refried beans, melted cheese, and salsa to make *molletes* (see [page 86](#) for a recipe), and it's often used to make *tortas*, or sandwiches. When a sauce, such as *mole poblano* (see [page 84](#) for a recipe), requires a thickener, stale bread is often called for in the recipe, and *bolillos* have a neutral flavor that makes them ideal for this purpose.

2 Cemita A specialty of Puebla now found across Mexico, this five-inch, round, egg-washed bread topped with sesame seeds is similar to brioche, only drier. In most parts of the country it is just another bread, but in the city of its origin the fluffy roll is beloved as the foundation for the *cemita poblana*, a sandwich of meat and cheese topped with avocado, onions, *chipotles en escabeche*, and the pungent herb called *papalo*.

3 Telera Popular in Mexico City, the crust of this ridged, seven-inch roll is softer than that of *bolillos*, but inside it's firm and dense. A sturdy vessel, it's the bread of choice for making *tortas*.

peeled, seeded, and roughly chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- 1 cup canola oil
- 8 6" corn tortillas
- 3 cups cooked shredded chicken
- 1½ cups shredded queso Oaxaca (see [page 90](#)) or mozzarella

1 Arrange an oven rack 4" from the broiler and heat broiler to high. Place tomatillos and serranos on a foil-lined baking sheet and broil, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 10 minutes. Let cool for about 10 minutes, and then peel and discard skins. Transfer to a blender along with cilantro, sour cream, cumin, garlic, poblanos, and 1 cup boiling water; season with salt and pepper, and purée until smooth. Set enchilada sauce aside.

2 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, grasp tortillas with tongs and fry in oil until pliable, about 1 minute. Transfer tortillas to a work surface. Place chicken in a bowl and toss with 1 cup enchilada sauce until evenly coated. Divide sauced chicken evenly among tortillas, and roll tortillas tightly around chicken. Pour about 1 cup enchilada sauce in the bottom of a 9" x 13" baking dish, and place tortilla rolls in dish, seam side down, creating one row down the center of the dish. Pour remaining enchilada sauce over rolls, and cover evenly with cheese.

3 Heat oven to 375°. Bake enchiladas until sauce is bubbling and cheese is melted on top, 25 minutes. Remove from oven, and let cool for 10 minutes. Serve with plenty of sauce.

Side Dishes

Cebollas Encurtidas

(Pickled Red Onions)

MAKES ABOUT 1¼ CUPS

Red onions soak up the flavors

of oregano and cumin in this relish, a beloved condiment of the Yucatán Peninsula.

- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 large red onion, thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and halved lengthwise
- 1 bay leaf
- 1½ cups red wine vinegar

In a bowl, toss salt and onion together; let sit until onion releases some of its liquid, about 15 minutes. Transfer onions with salt and liquid to a glass jar along with peppercorns, oregano, cumin, garlic, and bay leaf, and pour over vinegar; seal with a lid. Let sit at room temperature to marry flavors before using, at least 4 hours. Store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Papas con Rajas

(Sautéed Potatoes and Chiles)

SERVES 4

Smoky roasted poblano chiles add deep flavor to starchy potatoes in this side dish (pictured on [page 82](#)) typical of Central Mexico.

- 12 oz. small waxy potatoes, cut into ¼"-thick discs
- 3 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 medium white onion, thinly sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3 poblano chiles, roasted, peeled, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced
- 4 sprigs epazote (see [page 90](#)) or cilantro, roughly chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste

1 Place potatoes in a 4-qt. saucepan and cover with water by 1"; bring to a boil over high heat, and cook until just tender, about 20 minutes. Drain, and set aside.

2 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, and cook, stirring, until slightly

On a mission in the Mission

La Cocina recognizes that each one of their members—immigrant women with dreams of owning their own food businesses—has a story that is inspiring and real. It can be tasted in their food and felt in their kitchens. As an organization, La Cocina is helping their dreams grow into legitimate businesses, that are self-sufficient and successful.

“Our hearts beat for this neighborhood and we really and truly believe that it has a great story to tell.” *—La Cocina*



Alicia's Tamales Los Mayas

In August of 2010, Alicia Villanueva came to La Cocina with a dream: to start her own tamale cart, as a means to spread her own Mexican traditions and customs. For Alicia, the best tamales are stuffed with love, and the best people are stuffed with her tamales. She's been making delicious tamales for her family and friends for years, and finally decided that it was time to let the rest of the world in on her amazing food. Alicia's Tamales los Mayas launched at Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco in October 2011, you can find her there five days a week, and is also available to bring her tamale cart to your home.

aliciatamaleslosmayas.com



Azalina's

Azalina's is a local business in San Francisco that hand makes Malaysian products using her personal memories to create flavors that tickle your taste buds. Azalina comes from generations of street food vendors. She grew up eating rustic street foods and took them for granted until she left Malaysia and started missing all the tongue tingling flavors. She decided to share her memories of Malaysia by cooking for friends and family—then it began. Because of the unique flavor profile of these exotic foods, Azalina's enjoys getting to tell the great stories behind each dish and products that were prepared. You can find her packaged products at Bi Rite Market and all Whole Foods Markets stores in the Bay Area.

azalinas.com



Anda Piroshki

Everyone loves a hearty home-cooked meal and the warm memories and feelings of comfort that the smells and familiar ingredients evoke. Thanks to Anda Piroshki in Bernal Heights, those struggling to find Russian food like Mama used to make, time-starved parents, professionals and students looking for a quick yet healthy bite, and adventurous food fanatics alike can experience the simple pleasure of a homemade meal seven days a week. Serving up Russia's specialties, including piroshki, borscht, and oreshki in her shop at 331 Cortland, at local food events, and at private parties, Anda Piroshki makes it easy to enjoy a piece of home on the go.

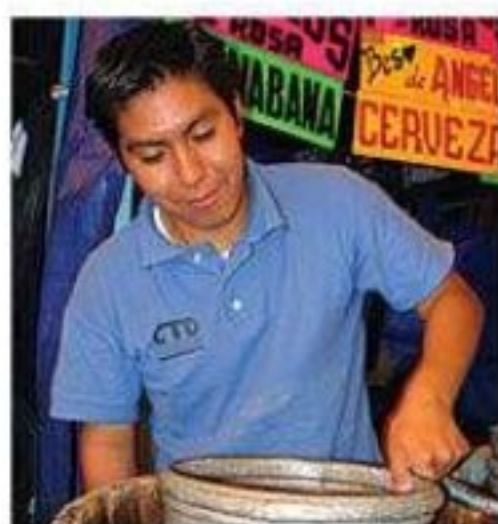
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LA COCINA AND THE MISSION DISTRICT

La Cocina is a nonprofit business incubator that provides affordable commercial kitchen space and technical assistance to low income immigrant women entrepreneurs who are launching, growing or formalizing food businesses. Located in the Mission District of San Francisco, La Cocina thrives off the cultural diversity of this culinary hub and celebrates the community with the San Francisco Street Food Festival, now in its fourth year.



Join La Cocina for the 4th Annual San Francisco Street Food Festival, August 18, 11 AM–7 PM. Visit SFStreetFoodFest.com for details.



Mexican Food Festivals

Three Kings Festival (January 6, Mexico City) Eaten to celebrate the Epiphany, the wreath-shaped *rosca de reyes*, or king's ring, is baked with a figurine inside. Whoever finds it must host a party on Candlemas Day, February 2. In Mexico City's *zócalo*, or main square, 200,000 portions are doled out, made with more than 1,700 pounds of butter (pictured above, center).

Ice Cream Festival (March 22, Tulyehualco) The pre-Hispanic people of Tulyehualco, now part of Mexico City, harvested ice from nearby snow-capped volcanoes to make frozen treats. At this 127-year-old fair (pictured above, right), more than 80 ice cream producers

pay homage to the tradition, offering flavors ranging from mango and lime to sweet mole.

Corn and Tortilla Fair (May 26–June 3, Santiago Tepalcatlán) In Xochimilco, a borough of Mexico City where farmers grow corn on man-made islands called *chinampas*, this annual fair (pictured above, left) celebrates Mexico's staple grain. Along with tortillas, visitors sample foods like *tlacoyos* (masa cakes stuffed with beans and other ingredients); *ponteduros*, a honey-and-cornmeal candy; and *esquites*, kernels fried in butter with chili powder and epazote.

Vanilla Festival (May 30, Papantla) At the annual Cor-

pus Christi festival in Veracruz, food stalls overflow with fragrant vanilla pods and bottles of extract, vanilla-flavored ice pastries, and *xanat* (vanilla liqueur). A highlight is the Dance of the Voladores, acrobats who suspend themselves from a 100-foot pole and twirl midair to music.

Apple Fair (August 10–18, Zacatlán) This Pueblan town fetes its diverse apple crop—from the tart, green-striped rayada, to sweet, golden peruana varieties. Attendees savor treats like *manzana hojaldra*, a flaky apple tart. The fair culminates in a parade of floats from which hundreds of apples are thrown to the crowd. —Marne Setton

caramelized, about 12 minutes. Add garlic and chiles, and cook, stirring, until heated through, 2 minutes. Add potatoes, and cook, stirring, until potatoes are very tender, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in epazote; season with salt.

Arroz a la Mexicana

(Mexican-Style Red Rice)

SERVES 6–8

This classic Mexican rice (pictured on page 32), embellished with tomatoes, serrano chiles, and peas, is a versatile side dish for all kinds of meat and vegetable main dishes.

- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 15-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 serrano chiles, halved lengthwise, seeds removed
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 small white onion, minced
- 2 cups long-grain white rice

- 1 cup frozen, thawed peas
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Place stock and tomatoes with juice in a blender, and purée until smooth; set tomato mixture aside.

2 Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add chiles, garlic, and onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 4 minutes. Add rice and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 6 minutes. Stir in tomato mixture and peas, season with salt and pepper, and reduce heat to low. Cook, covered, until rice is tender and has absorbed all the liquid, about 15 minutes. Remove rice from heat, and gently fluff with a fork before serving.

Salsa de Albañil

(Tomatillo Salsa with Avocado and

Queso Fresco)

SERVES 6

This fruity tomatillo salsa layered with *queso fresco* and avocado slices (pictured on page 57) can be served as a side dish or as an appetizer with warm tortillas. The recipe comes from cookbook author Diana Kennedy.

- 8 oz. tomatillos, husks removed, rinsed (see page 90)
- 1/3 cup plus 2 tbsp. roughly chopped cilantro
- 1/4 cup minced white onion
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 4 oz. queso fresco, cut into twelve 1/4" slices (see page 91)
- 1 avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and cut into 12 slices
- Warm tortillas, for serving

1 Bring tomatillos and 4 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan; cook until tomatillos are just soft, about 5 minutes. Drain and set aside to cool.

2 Place tomatillos, 1/3 cup cilantro, 2 tbsp. onion, chiles, garlic, and salt in a blender or food processor, and pulse until slightly chunky, about 20 pulses. Pour salsa into a serving dish and alternately layer queso fresco and avocado over salsa; sprinkle with remaining cilantro and onion. Serve with tortillas.

Frijoles de Olla

(Stewed "Pot" Beans)

SERVES 6

These stewed pinto beans (pictured on page 57) can be eaten with tortillas for a light meal, or as a side dish for many savory foods.

- 1 lb. dried pinto beans
- 1/2 small white onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp. lard (see page 91) or canola oil
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Crema (see page 90) or sour cream, for garnish

- 1 cup shredded queso Oaxaca (see page 90) or mozzarella
- Blistered serrano chiles, for serving
- Warm tortillas, for serving

1 Bring beans, onion, lard, and 10 cups warm water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered and stirring occasionally, until beans are just tender and begin to split open, about 2 hours. Add salt, and continue cooking, mashing some of the beans in the pot as they cook, until beans are completely soft, about 30 minutes more.

2 To serve, ladle beans into serving bowls and garnish with a spoonful of crema and some of the cheese. Serve with chiles and tortillas.

Chiles Curtidos

(Pickled Peppers)

MAKES ABOUT 1 QUART

These vinegary pickled chiles are an essential condiment for all kinds of street foods in Mexico.

- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 small white onion, thinly sliced
- 1 medium carrot, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 10 red or green jalapeños, pricked with a paring knife
- 1 cup distilled white vinegar
- 1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 dried bay leaf

Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, carrot, and garlic, and cook, stirring, until barely tender, about 3 minutes. Add jalapeños, and cook, stirring, for 4 minutes. Add vinegar, salt, oregano, bay leaf, and 2 cups water, and bring to a boil; remove from heat and let cool to room temperature. Transfer to a storage container and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

SAVEUR MENU

SAVEUR's guide to EVENTS, PROMOTIONS & PRODUCTS



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Fall Food Festivals on Oahu

Oahu is a world-class culinary destination offering a vibrant, eclectic food scene with an amazing variety of fantastic dining options and food festivals to discover to discover. This August, come to Oahu and indulge your taste buds at the Bon Appétit! A Tribute to Julia Child, during a month-long celebration by The Kahala Hotel & Resort. And from September 6-9, mingle and dine amongst celebrity chefs and their award-winning creations at the second annual Hawaii Food & Wine Festival.

Visit GoHawaii.com/Oahu.



La Cocina's San Francisco Street Food Festival

SAVEUR is joining La Cocina in a celebration of food, life, and culture with the San Francisco Street Food Festival. You're invited to join us as we eat our way through this festival that brings micro-entrepreneurs, informal food vendors, renowned chefs and cooks from across the country together. Entrance is free and passports are available on the website for savings on food. Don't just read about it. Come taste it. And leave your cart in San Francisco.

Visit SFStreetFoodFestival.com.



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Salsas

Sikil P'ak

(Pumpkin Seed Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

This earthy toasted pumpkin seed salsa (pictured on page 62), a specialty of the Yucatán, is rich, thick, and satisfying. Serve it with tortilla chips for dipping.

- 1½ cups raw, unhulled pumpkin seeds (see page 90)
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored
- 1 habanero chile, stemmed
- 3 tbsp. finely chopped cilantro
- 3 tbsp. finely chopped chives
- Kosher salt, to taste

1 Heat an 8" skillet over medium-high heat. Add pumpkin seeds, and cook, swirling pan often, until lightly toasted, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a food processor, and process until smooth, about 45 seconds; set aside.

2 Return skillet to heat and add tomatoes and chile; cook, turning as needed, until charred all over, about 5 minutes for the chile, 7 minutes for the tomatoes. Transfer to food processor with pumpkin seeds along with cilantro, chives, and salt, and pulse until smooth. Transfer to a bowl, and serve at room temperature.

Salsa Roja

(Tomato and Chile Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

Charred tomatoes give this vibrant red salsa (pictured on page 62) a hint of sweetness and smoke.

- 10 dried guajillo chiles (see page 91)
- 6 dried árbol chiles (see page 91)
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 plum tomatoes, cored
- 1 small white onion, halved
- Kosher salt, to taste

1 Heat a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add guajillo and árbol chiles, and cook, turning as needed, until lightly toasted all over, about 1 minute. Transfer to a bowl, and cover with boiling water; let sit until chiles are soft, about 20 minutes. Drain chiles, reserving 1 cup soaking liquid, and remove stems and seeds. Transfer chiles and reserved soaking liquid to a blender and set aside.

2 Return skillet to high heat. Add garlic, tomatoes, and onion, and cook, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 6 minutes for garlic, 15 minutes for tomatoes, and 12 minutes for onion. Transfer to blender with chiles along with salt, and purée until smooth and silky, at least 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, and serve at room temperature.

Salsa de Piña

(Fresh Pineapple Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS

Tropical fruit adds sweetness and acidity to this fragrant, spicy salsa (pictured on page 62). The tart pineapple is a perfect foil for rich meats, stewed chicken, and roasted fish.

- 2 cups finely chopped pineapple
- ½ cup finely chopped cilantro
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 4 serrano chiles, stemmed and minced
- 1 small red onion, minced

Place all ingredients in a large bowl, and toss until evenly combined. Let sit at room temperature to meld flavors, at least 30 minutes.

Salsa de Cacahuete y Chile de Árbol

(Peanut and Árbol Chile Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

This peanut-chile sauce (pictured on page 62), a take on a traditional salsa from Chiapas, Mexico, is delicious spooned on grilled chicken or shrimp.

- ½ cup canola oil
- 2 tbsp. sesame seeds
- 10 dried árbol chiles, stemmed (see page 91)
- 1 dried guajillo chile, stemmed (see page 91)
- 8 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 small white onion, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- Kosher salt, to taste
- ½ cup roasted, unsalted peanuts

1 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add sesame seeds, both chiles, garlic, and onion, and cook, stirring, until onions are soft and sesame seeds are lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Remove from the heat, and transfer to a food processor; let cool to room temperature. Add vinegar, oregano, and salt, and purée until smooth.

2 Return skillet to heat, and add peanuts; cook, swirling pan, until lightly toasted, about 3 minutes. Transfer to food processor, and pulse along with the other ingredients until the peanuts are finely chopped, about 20 pulses. Add 1 cup water, and pulse until salsa is smooth but slightly chunky, about 10 pulses. Transfer to a serving bowl, and serve at room temperature.

Salsa Verde

(Green Tomatillo Salsa)

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

Bright and fruity, this salsa (pictured on page 62) is the perfect counterpoint to the richness of cheesy dishes and grilled meats.

- 4 oz. tomatillos, husked and rinsed (see page 90)
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 medium white onions, quartered
- 2 jalapeños, stemmed
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 bunch cilantro, stemmed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Place tomatillos, garlic, onions, and jalapeños in a 4-qt. saucepan; cover with water by 1". Bring to a boil; cook until slightly soft, about 5 minutes. Drain and reserve 1 cup cooking

liquid.

2 Transfer to a blender along with reserved liquid, sugar, cilantro, and salt and pepper; pulse until chunky. Transfer to a bowl, and serve at room temperature.

Salsa con Camarón Seco

(Oaxacan Shrimp Pico de Gallo)

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

In coastal Oaxaca, both fresh and dried shrimp appear in all kinds of preparations. Here, they bring texture and intense umami flavor to a classic *pico de gallo* (pictured on [page 62](#)).

- 1 lb. plum tomatoes, cored and roughly chopped
- 4 oz. Mexican dried shrimp (see [page 91](#)), soaked overnight, drained and roughly chopped
- ¼ cup roughly chopped pickled jalapeños, plus 2 tbsp. brine from jar
- ¼ cup roughly chopped cilantro
- ½ small white onion, roughly chopped
- Juice of 2 limes
- Kosher salt, to taste

In a large bowl, combine tomatoes, shrimp, jalapeños plus brine, cilantro, onion, and juice. Season with salt, and let sit at room temperature to meld flavors, at least 1 hour.

Desserts

Churros con Chocolate Caliente

(Mexican Fritters with Hot Chocolate)

MAKES ABOUT 5 DOZEN

Ruben Ortega, a native of Puebla and the pastry chef at Hugo's in Houston, Texas, shared his recipe for these long, fluted fritters (pictured on [page 94](#)), served with thick hot chocolate for dunking.

- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 stick cinnamon, preferably canela (see [page 90](#)), plus 1 tbsp. ground
- 2¼ cups flour
- 1 egg
- 2 cups sugar
- 6 oz. Mexican chocolate, such as Ibarra, roughly chopped
- 4 cups milk
- Canola oil, for frying

1 Make the churros: Bring butter, salt, vanilla, cinnamon, and 2¼ cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Remove and discard cinnamon, and add flour; cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until a smooth dough forms, about 5 minutes. Transfer dough to a bowl, and add egg; stir vigorously until dough is smooth. Transfer dough to a piping bag fitted with ⅜" star tip and set aside. Meanwhile, combine sugar and ground cinnamon in a large brown paper bag or a 9" x 13" baking dish; set aside.

2 Make the hot chocolate: Bring chocolate and milk to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-

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high heat, and cook, stirring, until chocolate dissolves completely; set aside.

3 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in an 8-qt. Dutch oven; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 400°. Working in batches, hold piping bag above oil, and pipe about four 6" lengths of dough. Fry, turning often, until golden brown, about 2 minutes (see "Frying Churros," page 78).

4 Transfer to paper towels to drain briefly, and then transfer to bag or dish with cinnamon-sugar mixture, and quickly shake or roll until evenly coated. Repeat with remaining dough in piping bag. Reheat chocolate, and whisk vigorously until foamy; serve churros immediately with cups of chocolate for dipping.

Raspado de Mango

(Mango Ice)

SERVES 6-8

This refreshing frozen treat (pictured on page 94) is a Mexican version of granita.

- 4 cups bottled or fresh mango juice or nectar
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice

Heat 2 cups mango juice, sugar, and salt in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring, until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat, and stir in remaining mango juice and lime juice; let cool. Pour into an 8" x 8" baking dish and place in freezer. Freeze, scraping and stirring mixture thoroughly every hour as ice crystals form, to prevent it freezing into a solid mass, until mixture is the consistency of shaved ice, about 4 hours. Spoon into chilled bowls to serve.

Polvorones

(Pecan Shortbread Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 4 DOZEN

Finely ground pecans and *canela* flavor these delicate shortbread cookies (pictured on page 94), a popular treat all over Mexico.

- ¾ cup pecans
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1½ cups flour
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon, preferably *canela* (see page 90)
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract, preferably Mexican
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar

1 Combine pecans and ¼ cup sugar in food pro-

cessor, and process until very finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add remaining sugar along with flour, cinnamon, and salt, and pulse until evenly incorporated. Add butter and vanilla, and process until dough just comes together and forms a ball. Transfer ball to lightly floured work surface, and form into a disk; wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour. Meanwhile, place confectioners' sugar in a large bowl; set aside.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Transfer dough to work surface, and using a rolling pin, roll dough until ½" thick. Using a 1¼" round cutter, cut out cookies and transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spacing them 2" apart. Reroll dough scraps and cut out more cookies; transfer to the baking sheet. Chill cookies for 30 minutes. Bake, rotating baking sheets front to back and top to bottom halfway through baking, until lightly browned and set, about 14 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes, and then place in bowl of confectioners' sugar; toss to coat evenly in sugar and serve.

Capirotada

(Mexican Bread Pudding)

SERVES 6-8

This dessert (pictured on page 94), layered with cheese and soaked in a syrup made with *piloncillo*, a type of brown sugar used in Mexican cooking, is a traditional Lenten feast dish.

- 1½ cups finely chopped *piloncillo* (see page 91) or packed light brown sugar
- 1 stick cinnamon, preferably *canela* (see page 90)
- 2 eggs
- 8 oz. stale bolillos (see page 98) or country white bread, cut into 1" cubes
- 8 oz. queso Oaxaca (see page 90) or mozzarella, grated
- ¾ cup raisins
- ½ cup roughly chopped almonds
- 8 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed and chilled
- Vanilla ice cream, for serving (optional)

1 Heat oven to 350°. Bring sugar, *canela*, and 1½ cups water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over high heat; cook until reduced by a quarter, about 40 minutes. Discard cinnamon, and set aside to cool; once cool, whisk in eggs until smooth.

2 Combine bread, ¾ of the cheese, raisins, and almonds in a bowl; pour over syrup and toss until evenly coated. Transfer to an 8" x 8" baking dish, sprinkle with remaining cheese, and dot with butter; cover dish with foil. Bake until pudding is bubbling hot and cheese is melted, about 10 minutes. Uncover, and continue baking until cheese is lightly browned, about 12 minutes more. Scoops into bowls; serve with ice cream, if you like.



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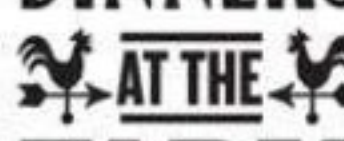
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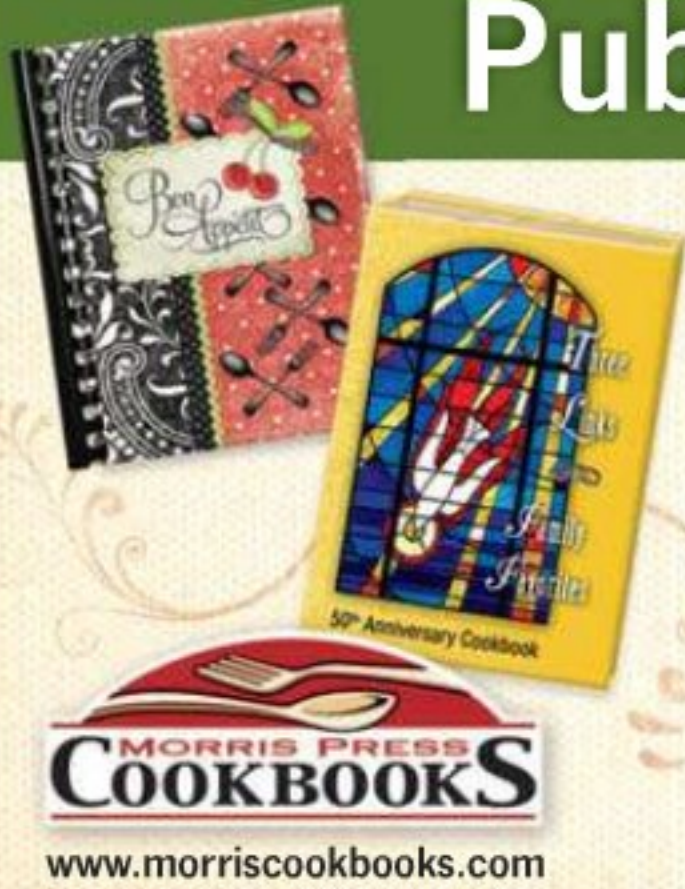
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